

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 1981

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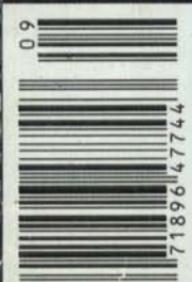


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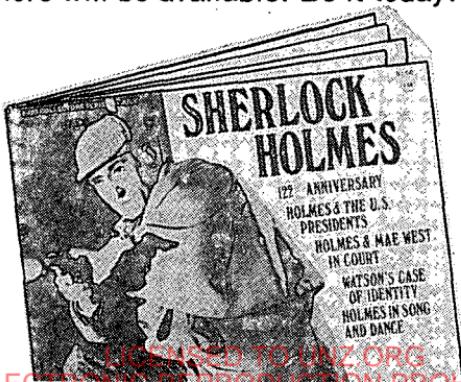
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MIKE SHAYNE

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Cover painting by Merle Keller

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

GARY BRANDNER (*Dear Strangler*) gives us this update:

Having achieved unparalleled success in Tinsel Town (as we call it), I am now living in the condo splendor of Huntington Beach. Here it is my intention to bleach my hair and become King of the Surfers, as soon as I can find the ocean. By the time your September issue hits the stands, my latest smasheroo from Fawcett, **HELLBORN**, will be available where fine paperbacks are sold. A plug couldn't hurt. [Ed. Note: Gary is also the author of the novel **THE HOWLING**, which was recently made into a highly successful motion picture.]

RICHARD LAYMON (*Blarney*) informs us:

September or October will see the release of my second Warner horror book, **THE WOODS ARE DARK**. At that time, **THE CELLAR** will be reissued. My most recent work to see print, otherwise, is a short horror story appearing in Bill Pronzini's anthology, **CREATURE**. The story, "Barney's Bigfoot Museum," is considered by at least one writer to be the best in the collection. Guess who.

PATTY MATTHEWS (*Going to Pot*)

has had a phenomenal series of nine consecutive best-selling novels in the past five years, surpassing all publishing records. In 1954 Patty began writing and selling mystery, science fiction and occult stories; a science fiction novel; and several Gothic mysteries under the name of Patty Brisco, while holding down a full-time job and raising two sons. Her romantic "Love" series was launched in 1976 with the publication of LOVE'S AVENGING HEART, and eight books later Patty has come to be known as "America's First Lady of Historical Romance." In addition, she recently authored an occult novel, THE NIGHT VISITOR, under the pseudonym of Laura Wiley.

CLAYTON MATTHEWS (*Bucknell's Law*)

has authored more than 100 books, 50 short stories and innumerable magazine articles. Born in Waurika, Oklahoma in 1918, Matt (as he is known to both his friends) worked as a surveyor, overland truck driver, gandy dancer, and taxi driver. In 1960 he became a full-time author with the publication of RAGE OF DESIRE. More recent books include THE POWER SEEKERS (winner of the *West Coast Review of Books* Bronze Medal for Best Novel in 1978). THE HARVESTERS and THE BIRTHRIGHT, the first book of a trilogy. Books two and three, THE DISINHERITED and THE REDEEMERS, are slated for future publication.

Patty and Matt have also collaborated on a suspense novel, MIDNIGHT WHISPERS, due out in December from Bantam.

Continued on page 80

It was a floating mystery writers' convention, but the murders on board were not the figments of anyone's imagination — they were for real!

Killer's Cruise

by BRETT HALLIDAY

MICHAEL SHAYNE LEANED BACK IN HIS CHAIR, lifted his legs, and placed his large feet on the battered desk that was the main piece of furniture in his private office. A cigarette dangled from his lips, and as he leisurely blew smoke toward the ceiling and regarded the warm late morning sunlight that was coming in through the window, he said, "Just what is it that's eating you, Tim?"

The other person in the room was an animated scarecrow in a rumpled suit. In contrast to Shayne's casual attitude, he was sitting on the edge of a straight chair, puffing quickly on a cigarette and glaring at the big private detective.

"You know damn well what's eating me, Mike," Timothy Rourke said. "You go off on a case involving UFO's and God knows what else, then nearly get yourself killed coming home, and you won't even give me the lowdown on what really happened. We've been pals a long time, Mike. Surely you could give me the story."

Shayne's bushy red eyebrows lifted as he smiled mockingly. "I didn't know you were so offended," he said. "But I told you, Tim, the story's not mine to give out. I told you who to contact."

"Yeah, sure," Rourke replied sardonically. "Only the guy you referred me to seems to have left the country, and everybody I ask any questions suddenly dummies up. I know some sort of government business is involved here, Mike, and I'll find out what it is sooner or later. I didn't get my reputation as a reporter by giving up."

Shayne was saved from having to think up a suitably sarcastic rejoinder by the opening of the door between his office and the outer office. Lucy Hamilton, his longtime secretary and much more besides, came into the room with several envelopes in her hand. Placing them on the desk, she said, "Here's the mail, Michael. The usual assortment, plus one I didn't open."

It was unusual for Lucy not to open anything addressed to the agency, but Shayne saw as he picked up the envelope she had indicated that it was addressed to him and marked PERSONAL in bold letters. It wasn't thick enough to be a letter-bomb, he discovered as he ran his blunt fingers over it, so he saw no harm in ripping it open.

Two rectangles of heavy paper fell out onto the desk. Shayne sat up and turned them over to see what they were. A frown creased his forehead, and he said, "You say this came in the mail, Angel?"

"Just a few minutes ago. What is it, Michael?"

Rourke was craning his neck to see what Shayne had found in the envelope. The lanky reporter said, "They look like tickets of some kind."

"They are tickets," Shayne grunted. "Tickets for a cruise."

"A cruise?" Lucy exclaimed. "On a ship?"

"The *Caribe Queen*." Shayne glanced from one ticket to the other. The one on the right had his name printed on it, but the space for the passenger's name on the other one was blank. "Leaving Miami tomorrow for a ten-day cruise of the Caribbean." He scooped up the tickets and held them in his hand, still frowning at them. "These things don't come cheap."

Rourke reached over with a long arm and picked up the envelope. "Anything else in here?" He turned it up and shook it but nothing came out. And there was no return address on it anywhere. "Miami postmark," Rourke mused. "Somebody must think pretty highly of you, Mike, to send you expensive ducats like these. Think maybe an appreciative client might have sent them as a gesture of thanks?"

SHAYNE THOUGHT BACK OVER THE MAJOR CASES he had been involved with over the last several months, and he shook his head. While his right hand held the tickets, his left came up and tugged on the lobe of his left ear. He seemed unconscious of the action. "I guess some of my clients have been wealthy enough to spring for something like this," he said slowly, "but I can't see any of them doing it."

"I think you're overlooking the important question," Lucy said. "Are you going or not?"

"Hell, Angel, I can't just drop everything and take a pleasure cruise,

you know that."

"Is that so," Lucy perched a trim hip on the corner of Shayne's desk and one leg swung prettily in the air. "I happen to know that you're not working on any cases at the moment, Michael. Or did you forget that I work here?"

Rourke grinned. "I think Lucy has some ideas about who might use that second ticket, Mike."

"I might be able to make a suggestion," Lucy said with an open grin. "How about it, Michael? Don't you think a vacation would do you some good, after everything you've been through in the last few weeks?"

"I thought I was heading for a vacation when I took that case down in the Keys," Shayne growled. "Look how that turned out."

"But this wouldn't be that way at all. You wouldn't be taking a case this time — "

The ringing of the phone broke into Lucy's argument. She scooped up the receiver of the instrument on the desk and said, "Michael Shayne's office." After listening for a few seconds, she went on, "Just a moment, please. I'll see if he's in." She covered the mouth-piece and said to Shayne quietly, "It's a man named Martin Sanger. He says he wants to hire you. Remember the tickets, Michael."

She said this last as Shayne reached for the phone. Taking it from her, he said into it, "This is Shayne."

The voice that came back over the wire was high-pitched but definitely male, with a hurriedness and anxiety about it. "Mr. Shayne," it said, "I doubt that you know my name, but I assure you, I have a legitimate case for you to handle, if you will."

"Well, suppose you tell me about it, Sanger."

"Of course. I believe you should have received your mail by now, correct?"

Shayne glanced up at Lucy. She was trying to watch him without staring, but he could tell she was intensely interested in what went on during this conversation. He knew she wanted to take that cruise, and she wanted to accompany him. The prospect sounded pretty appealing to him, too. He couldn't help but be suspicious of two tickets that arrived so mysteriously, though. And now this Martin Sanger, whoever he was, was asking about the very mail that had brought the tickets.

"That's right," Shayne said, not wanting to say anything on his end just yet that might give away the subject of the conversation.

"And in an envelope marked for your personal attention, there were two tickets for passage on the luxury liner, *Caribe Queen*."

This time it was more of a statement and less of a question, but Shayne said anyway, "Right again. How did you know that?"

"I sent them, Mr. Shayne. I'm sure that comes as no surprise to you."

"Yeah," Shayne grunted. How else would the man have known? He continued, "Now, how about telling me why?"

"I want to hire you to take that cruise, Mr. Shayne," Sanger said. "But I would really rather explain the reasons to you in person. Could you come over to my hotel?" He named a popular beachfront hotel in Miami Beach and gave Shayne the room number.

"I don't usually meet somebody unless I know the reason why," Shayne said slowly, still worrying his earlobe. He had been in the business a long time, and caution was one of the main reasons he had survived so many dangerous cases. "I've got to know what it's about."

There was a long moment of silence on the other end, and Shayne actually began to wonder if Sanger had been cut off. He was aware of Lucy and Rourke watching him, curiosity on their faces.

Sanger finally said, "I really would prefer a face to face meeting, Mr. Shayne. I have my reasons for that. But I will tell you that if you accept the proposition I put before you, I'm prepared to pay you fifty thousand dollars."

SHAYNE COULDN'T KEEP ONE EYEBROW FROM QUIRKING in surprise. Even in these inflationary times, fifty thousand bucks was a lot of money, and Shayne had a soft spot for such lures. It probably wouldn't hurt to go talk to the guy, he reasoned.

"All right," he said abruptly. "I'll give a listen to what you've got to say. But that's all I'm promising until after I've heard the story."

"Fair enough," Sanger said. "When can I expect you?"

Shayne glanced at his watch. "I'll be there in about half an hour," he said.

"Fine, I'll be looking for you. And I don't think you'll regret this, Mr. Shayne."

"We'll see," Shayne said, and replaced the receiver in its cradle. He looked at it for a moment, then leaned back in his chair and regarded the tickets again, still clutched in his hand:

"Well, what was that all about?" Rourke demanded. "I guess it was just a stroke of luck that got you a case and kept you from taking that trip with Lucy here. Poor girl."

"I can speak for myself, Tim," Lucy put in. "What was it about, Michael?"

"Damned if I know," Shayne said, shaking his head. "This Sanger

didn't want to talk about it over the phone. I told him I'd come over to his hotel. About all he'd spill was that he was willing to spend fifty thousand on the job."

Rourke let out a low whistle. "I guess you could always go on a cruise some other time!"

Shayne stood up, revealing the height and power of his rangy body. When he had come in earlier, he had put his hat on the desk, rather than pitching it onto the hatrack as he usually did, and now he settled it down on his rumpled, coarse red hair. "Maybe we won't have to settle for another cruise. We may just go on this one after all, Angel."

"What do you mean, Michael?"

"I mean that Sanger said he was the one who sent the tickets." Shayne looked speculative as he put another cigarette in his mouth. "He's providing the tickets, and he says he'll pay me the fifty grand to go on the cruise. I told him I'd go hear the story. Be back in a little while."

Shayne strode toward the door while Lucy and Rourke looked surprised and confused behind him. By the time the thought of tagging along occurred to Rourke, Shayne was out of the office and down the hall.

FROM THE TIME SHAYNE RECLAIMED THE BUICK from the parking garage and pointed it toward Miami Beach, it took him the thirty minutes he had specified to cover the distance between his Flagler Street office and the hotel where Martin Sanger was staying. Late morning traffic had the streets busy as he crossed Biscayne Bay on one of the long, arching causeways. It was a beautiful summer day in the Miami area, with the humidity low enough to make the heat bearable for a change.

Shayne didn't stop in the lobby after parking his car in the lot of Sanger's hotel. He went directly to the bank of elevators and boarded the first available one. As he punched the button for the seventh floor, he was joined in the car by two young children, their harassed-looking father, and two young women wearing short, lightweight robes over bikinis that almost weren't there. Their quick glances at Shayne's rugged form were appreciative.

Despite the fact that the two girls improved the scenery in the elevator, Shayne was glad when they got off on the fifth floor. The father and children had disembarked on the floor below, and Shayne had the car to himself as it climbed to the seventh floor. He could slip his gun out of its unobtrusive holster under his arm now and check it to be sure it was ready, should he need it. Sanger hadn't sounded

threatening on the phone — indeed he had sounded like he was the one being threatened — but a P.I. could never be sure of what he was walking into. That was one of the first lessons Shayne had learned.

Settling his pistol back into its sheath, Shayne watched the elevator doors slide open as he reached the seventh floor. He stepped out and strode quickly down a thickly-carpeted corridor. The atmosphere in the hallway was muted, hushed.

That was one reason the noises coming from behind the door Shayne was looking for sounded so out of place.

He stopped short, his hand raised to knock on the panel. It had only taken him a moment to locate the room that Sanger had mentioned, but the man hadn't said anything about a fight going on inside.

Shayne clearly heard the soggy thud of fists against flesh, heard gasps and moans and wheezes as someone tried desperately to regain the breath that had been knocked out of him. There was a quick burst of conversation inside, low enough so he couldn't make out the words, but plain enough that he couldn't mistake the savage tone of it. Shayne stood there for several seconds, listening to the sounds of violence inside the room, and then something resembling a grin stretched the gaunt planes of his lean face.

He put his left hand on the doorknob and turned it slowly, so slowly that it had only just begun to give when he paused to slip his gun out again with his other hand. He could tell the door was unlocked. A beat of time passed, and then Shayne twisted the knob suddenly, throwing the door open. He stepped into the room, gun raised and ready, and snapped, "Everybody hold it!"

II

SHAYNE'S GRAY EYES DARTED AROUND the opulently-furnished room, taking in the details of the scene in a split-second. In front of him, next to a fragile-appearing sofa, were three men. Two of them were big, muscles stretching the fabric of their suits, and they were holding a much smaller man between them. This third man was older, in his early fifties perhaps, with a pudgy face and pale skin. Glasses magnified his eyes.

The two men holding him saw the gun in Shayne's hand and stopped whatever they had been doing. For a moment that tableau was frozen in place. Then the big man on Shayne's left moved suddenly.

The smaller man let out a yell as he was thrown bodily toward the redhead newcomer. Shayne bit back a curse and dodged to the side. He couldn't squeeze off a shot under the circumstances. He lunged

past the smaller man, who was tripping on the thick carpet and falling toward the floor.

Shayne saw a fist coming at his face and jerked his head to the side. He thrust the pistol out hard, jabbing it savagely into the stomach of the man who had thrown the punch. The man's breath exploded into Shayne's face as the barrel of the gun sank into his belly.

The other man hooked a blow into Shayne's side. Shayne grunted in momentary pain and flung an elbow out. It jarred into the man's sternum, sending him backwards two steps. Shayne whipped the gun in his hand around in a backhanded swipe. It thudded into the man's skull.

An arm looped around Shayne's neck. The first one had recovered enough from the blow to the stomach to jump at Shayne's back. Shayne staggered under the weight and grabbed back over his shoulder with his free hand. He felt his fingers tangle in hair. They closed, and he yanked as hard as he could.

A cry of pain echoed in his ear. He brought his foot down as hard as he could on his attacker's instep and was rewarded with another yell. Shayne spun, threw himself backwards at a wall. Oil paintings leaped from their places on the wall as the impact shook them loose.

Even as he felt the man behind him starting to go limp, Shayne saw the other one leaping at him again. Blood was streaming down the man's face from the cut that Shayne's gun had opened up. Shayne braced himself against the wall and the body of the other man and raised his foot.

The man ran right into it. Shayne grimaced at the force of the collision and bounced off the wall. The man was clutching his belly and turning pale, and he started to topple over.

Shayne turned and started to check on the man he had slammed into the wall with his body. The man was almost out on his feet, but he was still clawing awkwardly under his coat.

From his sprawled position on the floor several feet away, the man with the glasses cried, "Look out!"

The attacker's hand came back into sight, holding a gun loosely, and Shayne grated, "Dammit!" He hadn't wanted to do any shooting unless he had to . . .

SHAYNE WAS BRINGING HIS GUN UP when the man he had kicked in the stomach got his hands on a small end table and heaved it at him. The table hit the back of Shayne's knees, throwing him off balance. His shot went wild, thudding into the ceiling.

Shayne heard the crash of the other man's gun, felt something burn

along the side of his head. For a second, all he could see was a brilliant pinwheel of light, spinning madly somewhere between his eyes and his brain. He staggered, but kept his feet.

Through eyes that still didn't want to work right, he saw the two men heading for the door in a frenzied run. He didn't trust himself to fire after them, but he took several quick steps in the same direction. The floor seemed to tilt wildly, and he had to stop to shake his head violently. That cleared the cobwebs away, his vision snapped back to normal, and he hurried to the door.

Looking cautiously out into the hall, he saw the doors of the elevator sliding shut. Shayne broke into a run, dimly aware of the man in the glasses saying something behind him. When he reached the bank of elevators, he saw that none of the other cars were any where near the seventh floor. And he knew that their headstart was large enough that he wouldn't be able to catch them by charging down the stairs. He wasn't sure he would be able to navigate the stairs, anyway. He jammed his pistol back into its holster and turned back toward the man he had left.

The man with the glasses was standing in the doorway, watching him anxiously. As Shayne approached him, he burst out, "Are you all right? Should I call an ambulance?"

Shayne stepped past him into the room. There was a mirror on the wall, and he regarded his reflection critically. There was a small red mark on the side of his face, just below the temple, but no blood oozed from it. "Didn't even break the skin," he grunted to himself. "No, that's okay," he said to the smaller man. "I think it just grazed me and shook me up for a minute. Just a lucky shot; the guy was so near out of it he was doing good to hit anything. Are you Sanger?"

The man swallowed, looking shaken by the violence and Shayne's abrupt question. He said, "That's right, I'm Martin Sanger. And you are Mr. Shayne?"

"Yeah." Shayne bent, scooped his hat from where it had fallen on the floor, and tossed it onto a dainty little table. He went on, "You'd better tell me what this is all about in a hurry, Sanger. The cops will be here before long. Shootings don't go unreported in this part of town. We'd better get our story straight."

"Story?" Sanger gulped.

"Right. I want to know how much of the truth to tell Peter Painter's boys."

Sanger leaned against the arm of the sofa. "But . . . but I don't know why those men broke in here and attacked me. They knocked on the

door, and when I answered it, they burst in and began to terrorize me — ”

Shayne jammed a cigarette into his mouth and lit it with a sharp motion. “Quit it,” he said tightly. “You send me those tickets, then call up and say you want to hire me for fifty grand, and when I get here, I find two hoods roughing you up. Don’t tell me you don’t see the connection.”

“How . . . how do you know they were hoods?”

“I don’t know their names, but I’ve seen them around town. The type is pretty common. They’re muscle for hire, but brains don’t come along in the bargain. Somebody else had to be behind them. Are you going to spill it, or do I walk out of here and let you talk to the cops by yourself?”

Shayne’s harsh tones were getting through to Sanger, shaking him out of his fear and confusion, as the big detective had intended. He sank down on the sofa and looked up at Shayne. “I’m a publisher, Mr. Shayne. Perhaps you’ve seen some of my books. Sanger Press?”

Shayne shook his head. “I don’t pay much attention to publishers when I read.”

“We do a very general list, about an even mixture of fiction and non-fiction. Our headquarters are in New York, but I’m down here for the departure of the *Caribe Queen*. ”

“You’re going on the cruise?”

“That’s right. It’s a special trip, and all the passengers are going to be publishers, editors, or writers of mystery fiction and nonfiction. I’ll be going, of course, since we publish several mystery books every year, and so will one of my authors.”

Shayne blew out a cloud of smoke and absently ran a thumbnail along the line of his jaw. “Why did you tap me to go along, and what does it have to do with those two thugs who jumped you?”

Sanger passed a shaky hand over his face and took a deep breath. “I want to hire you to accompany us as a bodyguard, Mr. Shayne. The author I mentioned, Troy Dalton, has received several threats against his life.”

“Anything happened to him so far?”

“Not yet.” Sanger looked up at Shayne intently. “But we’ve been told that if Troy goes on this cruise, he’ll never come back alive.”

Shayne was pondering this statement when a sharp, insistent rapping came on the closed door. A voice called out, “Police! Open up!”

Shayne’s long legs took him across the room in quick strides. He swung the door open, canted the cigarette rakishly in his lips, and said, “Come in, gentlemen. We’ve been expecting you.”

THERE WERE TWO UNIFORMED OFFICERS IN THE HALL, with two more men in plainclothes behind him. One of the plainclothes men bulled past the harness cops and snapped, "Shayne! What the hell is going on here? I should have known when the squeal came in about shooting in a swanky hotel that you'd be mixed up in it."

"Take it easy, Ross," Shayne said. "Come on in, and I'll tell you all about it. Sanger, meet Lieutenant Ivan Ross, one of Chief Painter's detectives."

"Spare me the introductions and get on with it, Shayne," Ross growled, crowding into the room with the other cops at his heels. "The report said several shots were fired here."

"Two, to be exact," Shayne said. He pointed upwards. "One of 'em is in the ceiling. I fired that one. I'm not sure where the other one went, but it nicked me first." He laid a blunt finger on the small mark on his head. "It went down like this. I was visiting my friend here, Mr. Martin Sanger from New York, when two guys bust in and try to hold us up. Typical strong-arm stuff. I'll come down to headquarters later and try to pick them out of the mug book for you, okay?"

"You're saying it was an attempted hold-up?"

"That's right. We traded a couple of shots, then the guys decided it was more trouble than it was worth. They took off, and I couldn't catch them."

Ross scowled and swung toward Sanger. "That the way it happened?"

"Yes, officer," Sanger nodded eagerly. Shayne could tell that he was glad the real story wasn't coming out. "Mr. Shayne saved my life, I'm sure of that."

"I wouldn't be so sure. I know this redhead sharpie. By the way, how about letting me see some ID?"

Sanger complied, exhibiting a seemingly endless string of credit cards in the process. Ross studied his New York driver's license, then asked, "Down here on business, Mr. Sanger?"

"Yes, I'm a publisher — "

"A publisher?" Ross favored Shayne with a hostile glance. "What kind of business would a publisher have with Mike Shayne?"

"I'm making a deal for my autobiography," Shayne grinned. "Keep it up, Ross, and I'll make sure you've got a prominent place in it. I'm already devoting a whole chapter to your boss Petey."

Ross muttered something obscene under his breath and hauled out his notebook. "Let's have the whole thing again," he said. "And it's official this time."

When Ross had their statements taken down, he motioned the other

cops to the door, then paused before going out and looked back at Shayne. "Don't think I'm not going to tell the chief about this," he said in warning tones.

"Go right ahead," Shayne snapped. "I don't think even Painter would want to call a respectable, prominent man like Sanger here a liar, do you?"

Ross grimaced and shut the door behind him.

Sanger started to say, "Thank you, Mr. Sh — ", but Shayne cut him off with a slashing motion of his hand. He stalked over to the door and opened it again, satisfying himself that the policemen were really gone. When he had shut it again, he said, "All right, now we can finish."

"Like I said, thank you for not telling them what really happened. I have enough problems already, and I'm not sure the police would understand.

"I sure as hell don't. You were saying that one of your authors had received some death threats."

"That's right. None of the threats have been directed specifically against me, but I'm sure this incident today was a warning. Someone doesn't want Sanger Press to publish Troy Dalton's book."

"Must be pretty hot stuff."

Sanger sighed. "There are people willing to kill to stop it from coming out, Mr. Shayne. Will you help me? Will you go along on the cruise and keep Troy and myself alive? You can bring whoever you like with you, and I have everything worked out already. Since this is a mystery cruise, what makes more sense than to invite a famous private detective along to sit on some of the panels?"

Shayne shook his head. "I haven't said I'd do it yet," he said, a bleak look on his face. "Bodyguarding isn't really my line of work. Now, if you were to agree to let me dig out whoever it is that wants you and this Dalton dead . . . ?"

"I'd like nothing better," Sanger said, his wan face lighting up. "Then you'll come along?"

Shayne sat down and crossed his legs casually. "Tell me the rest of it," he said. "Tell me why somebody wants Troy Dalton dead."

III

SANGER HESITATED AND LOOKED UNCOMFORTABLE. After a long moment, he asked, "Is it absolutely necessary for you to know that?"

"It is if I'm going to take the case," Shayne said flatly. "The more I

know, the better I can protect you and Dalton."

Sanger winced. "Please. Don't mention to Troy that I've hired you to look after him. He's very sensitive about things like that, considering his past and all."

Something about Dalton's name was striking a chord of recognition deep in Shayne's brain, and he frowned. "You're dancing around my question," he accused. "Now, how about it?"

Sanger took another deep breath, let out it in a tired sigh, and said, "Very well. The book has only a tentative title, but right now we're calling it *Blood Money*. It's Troy Dalton's story of his own life as a soldier of fortune and a mercenary."

Shayne nodded, the memory of a small newspaper item clicking into place in his head. "I remember him now," he said. "Wasn't there some story going around about how a government agency was trying to hire him for the jobs that were too dirty even for our agents?"

"Troy has worked for many governments, Mr. Shayne, but never for the United States. Which is not to say that Americans have never employed his services. Sometimes, when a situation in a foreign country is detrimental to American business interests, Troy would be called in to . . . change the situation."

"By whatever possible means, right?" Shayne sat up and went on, "Assassinations, revolutions, whatever was called for. I get the picture, Sanger."

"We really can't judge a man like that," Sanger began hurriedly, but Shayne interrupted with a snort.

"Hell, I'm not judging him. When you come right down to it, the only one he has to live with is himself. Now, he's planning to tell all about it in his book and expose some of his former bosses, is that it?"

"Exactly." Sanger's head bobbed up and down in a nod. "And a great many of them don't want that to happen. There has been pressure applied, through all the legal channels, to convince Sanger Press to cancel publication of Troy's book. But, for all intents and purposes, I am Sanger Press — "

"And you're not going to buckle under to the pressure," Shayne finished for him. Despite Sanger's unprepossessing demeanor, Shayne was starting to feel an admiration for the pudgy little man. It must take a lot of guts to stand up to giant corporations and the people behind them.

"Since legal pressure didn't work," Shayne continued, "you think these people are ready to try illegal means now. I'd say you're probably right."

Sanger sat forward, obviously warming to his subject. "I knew there

was going to be trouble as soon as rumors started going around about the manuscript. There are no secrets in the publishing business, Mr. Shayne. Everything gets around sooner or later. So far, we've managed to keep Troy in seclusion, where we felt that he was fairly safe, but he insists on taking this cruise. He's rather taken being an author to heart."

"Where's Dalton now?"

"In a suite right down the hall."

"Is anyone with him?"

"Yes, my executive vice-president, Thomas Johnson. Tom knows to call for help at the first sign of trouble."

"He's going along on the cruise?" Shayne asked.

"Yes, there's be the three of us. Four of us, if you come along, Mr. Shayne, and I sincerely hope you will."

Shayne cocked his head and tugged at his ear. "It sounds like it might be interesting. And I'm sure my secretary would enjoy the trip. The problem will be keeping her out of the case." He grinned. "I don't think she really believes I can take care of myself, let alone anybody else. All right, Sanger," Shayne put his hands on his knees and stood up, "you've got yourself a bodyguard. I'll keep you and Dalton and Johnson alive and try to nail any would-be killers at the same time."

Sanger stood up, too, beaming. "Thank you, Mr. Shayne. I'm sure we'll be all right now, with you on the job."

Shayne grimaced at the flattery. "Maybe you'd better hold onto that thanks until we get back. Can you get to the boat tomorrow morning on your own?"

"Yes, I'm sure we can. I think if any serious attempt is going to be made on Troy's life, it'll come after we've sailed, when we're all more exposed."

"I'll meet you on board then," Shayne said, shaking hands briefly with the publisher. "Until then, be careful who you open your door to."

"I will, you can be sure of that." Sanger paused, then spoke again just before Shayne reached the door. "Mr. Shayne. Since you know the full story now, I wonder if I might prevail on you for another favor?"

"I suppose so."

Sanger went over to the table with an expensive briefcase sitting on it and worked the latch of the case. From it, he took a thick, bound sheaf of paper. He crossed the room and held the pages out to Shayne.

"The manuscript?" Shayne asked.

"One of only two copies. The other one is locked up in my personal

safe in New York. I think I'd feel better if you'd keep this one."

"Why? If you've got a copy in New York"

"Accidents, or what appear to be accidents, have been known to happen, Mr. Shayne. In my job, you have to try to cover every possible angle."

Shayne smiled slightly. "Mine, too."

LUCY LOOKED SHOCKED BUT HAPPY when Shayne told her that they were indeed going on the Caribbean cruise, and her excitement was fairly bubbling over as she composed a mental list of all that she had to do before they left. Shayne didn't see how she could get it all done on such short notice, since the list included shopping for new clothes, packing, and getting the office ready to close for ten days. He didn't go into the details of the case, just told her that he would be going to do a job but that she could just enjoy the trip as a vacation. Rourke was still at the office when he returned, and the newsman wanted to know just what Shayne was up to. He groused when Shayne refused to give him the story, giving Shayne such a heart-rending look as he lamented about their years of friendship that Shayne had to laugh out loud. Rourke said, "Oh, hell. I guess that was a pretty sorry approach, wasn't it?"

"I'll tell you about it as soon as I can, Tim. That's a promise."

Shayne was a little surprised the next morning when he stopped at Lucy's apartment to pick her up. She was all packed and ready to go, and she looked stunning, besides. Shayne supposed that sooner or later he would learn not to doubt Lucy Hamilton's efficiency.

The *Caribe Queen* was due to leave port at eleven o'clock, and when Shayne and Lucy arrived a half hour before that, they found the big liner was already a beehive of activity. Shayne helped a porter load their luggage on a cart, then followed along behind with Lucy. He wasn't surprised to see Rourke lounging at the foot of the wide gangway that led up onto the main deck of the ship.

"Come to wish us bon voyage, Tim?" Shayne asked as they came up to the reporter.

"Exactly," Rourke replied, pressing the basket he held into Lucy's hands. "I brought you a little going-away present. Fruits and cheese and a bottle of Martell for you, Mike. Enjoy, you bum of a shamus."

"Such tender sentiments," Lucy said.

The crowd that was boarding pressed around them. Shayne kept his eyes moving, roving over the mob of people, alert for any sign of trouble. So far things had gone smoothly, but he didn't expect them to stay that way. The passengers going on board seemed to be an assort-

ment of all shapes, ages, and sizes, both male and female, and Shayne assumed that most of them had something to do with the writing and publishing of mystery and crime books. And yet somewhere among them could be a professional killer, recruited for the express purpose of shutting up Troy Dalton permanently. Shayne had spent a large chunk of his life around criminals, and he knew that they too came in all shapes and ages and sizes.

As he paused at the foot of the gangway with Lucy and Rourke, Shayne spotted Martin Sanger in the crowd approaching them. His eyes made contact with Sanger's for the briefest of moments, then Sanger looked away as if Shayne meant nothing to him. Shayne understood. He would be a lot more effective as a bodyguard if no one knew of his connection with Sanger and Dalton.

Sanger seemed to be alone, and Shayne wondered if Dalton and Thomas Johnson, the Sanger Press vice-president, had already boarded the ship. As soon as he got a chance, he was going to have to get together with Sanger and have him identify Dalton and Johnson.

Rourke was saying something about wishing them a good trip while Shayne watched the passengers unobtrusively. Sanger went past them and started up the gangway to the ship, carrying the briefcase Shayne had seen the day before in his left hand and holding onto the passage's low guard rail with his right hand. He was about halfway up to the deck when there was a sudden ripple of out-of-place movement beside him.

Even amidst the babble and uproar of the boarding throng, Shayne heard the cry that escaped from Sanger's lips as the publisher was forced against the guard rail. He saw Sanger's arms flail as he tried to keep his balance, but then the press of the crowd became too much. Sanger's legs hit against the railing again, and he over-balanced before Shayne's eyes. Before Shayne could do more than take a single step toward him, Sanger was toppling over the rail and falling toward the water.

A WOMAN SCREAMED SOMEWHERE. The fall wasn't a long one, less than a dozen feet, and Sanger barely had time to cry out again. There was a loud splash as he hit the water, and droplets were flung high into the air.

Shayne cursed. Even before all the drops of water had fallen back down, he was skinning out of his coat and tossing it along with his hat to Rourke. He kicked out of his shoes, took the three steps necessary to reach the edge of the dock, and knifed off it in a clean dive.

He had seen the way Sanger was struggling in the water, knew that the publisher had panicked. Even in the warm water next to the dock,

a man could drown in a hurry. It was deep here; it had to be for the big ships to dock. Shayne hit the water, cut into it, and stroked easily toward Sanger, who was yelling and splashing as he came to the surface for a few seconds before going under again.

There was a commotion above them on the dock and the ship, but Shayne ignored it. Life rings plopped onto the water nearby, thrown from the ship, and Shayne knew he would have no trouble getting the two of them fished out, once he had Sanger under his control.

Reaching the fear-stricken Sanger, Shayne let his feet down and tried to grab the man's windmilling arms. Sanger was still yelling, but Shayne's voice crashed out, overriding the inarticulate shouts.

"Hold it!" Shayne told him. "Calm down! You'll be all right, if you'll just relax. I won't let you drown."

Sanger didn't seem to hear him. Shayne was vaguely aware of Lucy calling out to him, "Be careful, Michael!" He knew that he had as much, if not more, to fear from Sanger's crazed struggles as he did from the water. He reached out, caught Sanger's wrists in a strong grip, and shouted again, "Calm down!"

Sanger seemed to become suddenly aware of Shayne's steady hold on him, and he relaxed slightly in the water. Shayne spat water out of his mouth and said, "That's better." He got Sanger to lie back, looped an arm around him, and towed him easily over to one of the life rings. As Shayne grasped it, members of the ship's crew pulled them back to the gangway. Rourke and others on the dock reached down to help Shayne get Sanger out of the water.

Shayne half-carried Sanger onto the ship, where towels were waiting. Lucy and Rourke followed closely behind. Shayne took one of the thick towels from a steward and draped it around Sanger's shoulders. "Let's get you to your cabin, mister," he said, continuing the charade of not knowing Sanger. "You'd better get dried off, even if it is warm today."

"Of . . . of course," Sanger nodded, gasping for breath. Another steward came up, carrying the briefcase Sanger had dropped on the gangway before falling, and Shayne took it from him. Sanger choked out the number of his stateroom, which had been printed on his now-soggy ticket, and a crewman directed them to it.

As they walked along, leaving wet footprints on the deck, Shayne said, "What a way to start a vacation, huh, with an accident like that?"

They entered a hall, and for a moment, no one else was close to them. In a voice low enough that only Shayne could hear it, Sanger said, "That was no accident. I — I can't swim a lick, Shayne, and whoever . . . whoever pushed me overboard knew that."

Shayne nodded grimly. He had been thinking the exact same thing.

IV

FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER, SHAYNE WAS IN HIS STATEROOM, finishing the task of changing into dry clothes. He had been struck by the smallness of the place, but Lucy, who had the adjoining cabin, said as they entered that all staterooms were supposed to be cozy. Shayne wasn't so sure of that; he liked having some room to move around in.

He had told Sanger that he would return to the main deck as soon as possible. Sanger agreed to go there, too, and Shayne thought that with all the confusion on this crowded ship, it wouldn't be too hard to find a moment to speak in private. Sanger was going to point Troy Dalton out to him.

There was a knock on the door between cabins, and Shayne opened it to find Lucy ready to go back up on deck. She said, "Did you get dried off, Michael?"

"Yeah," Shayne grunted, tossing a couple of soggy towels into the tiny bathroom. "I hadn't planned on taking a swim before we ever got on board."

"Was Mr. Sanger all right?"

"Just scared and damp, that's all. He thinks that somebody in that crowd used the confusion of boarding to shove him overboard deliberately."

"And what do you think?"

"I agree with him." Shayne dug into his open suitcase and came up with a dry pack of cigarettes. "I'll tell you all about it on our way upstairs, Angel. Now that Tim's not hanging around looking for a story, I think you'd better know what's going on."

"Poor Tim," Lucy smiled. "He smells something important, Michael, and he was sure he could worm it out of you. He looked so sad when we left him on the dock."

Shayne had to grin at the thought. "He'll get the story first, when the time's right. Until then, the fewer people who know, the better."

He lit the cigarette and then linked arms with Lucy, leading her out into the corridor. They turned toward the stairs that led back up to the main deck. As they walked, Shayne explained the case in low tones.

When he was finished, Lucy asked, "Do you think that Sanger's accident was really a murder attempt?"

A frown creased Shayne's forehead. "It's unlikely he would drown in a situation like that, with so many people around, but I think it was

deliberate, all right. The people who want Dalton dead want Sanger scared, too, so that he won't go ahead and publish the book."

"I'm not sure I understand why anyone would want to kill Dalton."

"If what Sanger told me about him is true, he was hired to do some pretty dirty work by people who put up quite a front. Their respectable image is important to them; they own large companies, and they don't want their stockholders knowing about some of the things that went on in the past. Dalton evidently blows the whistle in the book on murders, kidnappings, and other acts of terrorism that he was involved in on behalf of American business interests."

A small shudder ran through Lucy. "How can he confess to all these things and not get arrested?"

Shayne shrugged. "I looked through the copy of the manuscript that Sanger gave me. It's locked up back in the secret compartment of my suitcase, by the way. I didn't want to leave it in Miami. Anyway, Dalton is vague about the exact details of what he'd done in the past, and in most of the cases, there were no witnesses. And a lot of it took place in foreign countries, too, and some of them don't even have diplomatic relations with the United States anymore. He's covered his own tail real well, while leaving his former bosses open to all kinds of investigations."

"Troy Dalton sounds like a very unpleasant man."

"Yeah, Angel," Shayne said, "but I'm being paid to keep him alive. And it's not going to be an easy job. Not if what I suspect is true."

"And that is?"

Shayne's face was tight and hard as he spoke. "With so much at stake, I think the people who want Dalton shut up will run true to form. I'd be willing to bet there's a professional killer somewhere on this ship, just waiting for his chance."

THEY HAD REACHED THE STAIRS, and it took only a moment to climb them back up into the open air of the main deck. They had missed the moment of sailing, which was all right with Shayne. The *Caribe Queen* was underway, and Miami was falling behind them. The ship was so large that its motion on the open water was barely perceptible. The rise and fall of the sea could be felt, but only by those who were particularly sensitive to it.

The deck was crowded with passengers and crew members. Music was coming from loudspeakers, and it was competing with a constant babble of talk and laughter. Drinks were being passed around. The air was festive. This was a pleasure cruise, and the mystery writers were going to enjoy it. For the crew members, and for a redhead private

detective; though, it was work, pure and simple.

Shayne spotted Martin Sanger standing in a knot of people, a drink in his hand. The little publisher had dried and changed after Shayne left him at his stateroom, and he looked in control of himself again. He bore little resemblance to the wet, frightened man that Shayne had fished out of the bay. He still didn't look too happy, though. Shayne steered their course so that he and Lucy would pass by the group where Sanger was standing, and as they approached, he could sense the tension in the air. Sanger's companions were standing in almost rigid postures, and none of them looked any too pleased with the situation.

Shayne had planned to walk on past them and catch a moment along with Sanger later, but as they neared the group, Sanger looked up and saw him and Lucy. Sanger raised a hand and said in a louder voice, "There's the hero now. I'll introduce you to the man who saved my life. Mr. Shayne! Would you come over here, please?"

A curse sprang to Shayne's lips, but he forced it back and managed to put a smile on his face. He wondered what had happened to Sanger's plan to keep things quiet for a while.

As he and Lucy stepped up to the group, Sanger said, "This is Michael Shayne, the private detective. He's the one who pulled me out of the water." He extended his hand, and Shayne shook it briefly. "I'm sorry our meeting wasn't in more pleasant circumstances, Mr. Shayne, but regardless, I was glad to meet a famous detective like yourself."

Shayne saw what Sanger was doing, and he played along with it. "I'm glad I was there to help you out," he said. If Sanger wanted to make it look like they had met for the first time in the water that was all right with him.

Sanger gestured to the four people, two men and two women, with whom he had been talking. He said, "Mr. Shayne, I'd like to introduce you to some of my associates. The lovely lady in red is Edwina Highland."

Shayne murmured a greeting to the woman, who was blonde, still on the good side of forty, and sleekly attractive in an expensive dress.

"Edwina writes wonderfully creepy romantic suspense novels," Sanger went on. "And this is Stuart Conway . . ."

Conway was thin and dark, with piercing eyes and a sharp nose. His grip as he shook with Shayne was hard and aggressive.

"Stuart does those thick doorstoppers of suspense novels," Sanger said. "He's the world's leading expert at reviving the Nazi menace."

Shayne saw the quick glance Conway shot at Sanger, recognized the anger in it. Conway said, "All of my novels have their basis in histori-

cal fact, Sanger, you know that."

"Of course, of course. And this is one of my competitors, Mr. Shayne, David Carter, the president of Washburn and Wright Publishing, and his editor-in-chief, Priscilla Stanton."

Carter was a middle-aged man with a thick body and balding head. He returned Shayne's handshake limply and said, "Glad to meet you, Mr. Shayne."

"And so am I," Priscilla Stanton said. She was a slender brunette with a slightly avaricious look about her eyes. She went on, "I've heard a great deal about Miami's most famous private eye. Perhaps we could discuss the possibility of you doing a book for us sometime."

"I'm no writer," Shayne grunted. "I leave that to Tim Rourke and that other guy." He felt Lucy's fingers digging into his arm slightly, and he had to suppress a grin. Priscilla Stanton was making no secret of the fact that she found him appealing.

"We were just discussing the publishing business," Sanger went on. "It seems to be a rather declining state as far as mysteries are concerned. Of course, it may not be that way all over, David, just because sales are off over at your house."

Carter colored slightly at the dig, and Shayne tried not to frown. Sanger's disdain of these people was bordering on the blatant, and that was a side of the little publisher that Shayne hadn't seen before. Shayne wondered if he sniped at everyone in the business that way. At any rate, he could see why there had been a feeling of uncomfortable tension in the air when he and Lucy walked up.

Shayne introduced Lucy to the group, stepping in with the introduction quickly following Sanger's gibe at Carter. He was going to have to talk with Sanger, he thought. With all the trouble they already had, what with a hired killer possibly after Dalton, the last thing they needed was for Sanger to be antagonizing his fellow passengers. That would only confuse things.

And confusion could be deadly, Shayne knew, when a pro was on the other side.

"Excuse us," Shayne said to the group, and took Lucy's arm again. He tried to keep any undue emphasis out of his voice as he went on, "I hope we'll get a chance to talk again later, Sanger."

"Of course, Mr. Shayne. And thank you again for saving me."

Shayne nodded to the people and moved away, Lucy on his arm. As soon as they had gone a few feet, she hissed, "What was that all about, Michael?"

"I'm not sure," Shayne replied in a low voice. "But I didn't like it, Angel."

They found an empty spot by the railing, and leaned on it, watching the foaming water slide past the ship. The sun was shining brightly, and there was a warm breeze in their faces and Shayne thought that this would be a lovely place for a vacation, if he hadn't been there on a job. As it was, though, he had a feeling that this luxury liner was likely to be as deadly as any back alley in Miami.

A FEW MINUTES PASSED PLEASANTLY ENOUGH as they stood by the railing, but then Shayne saw Sanger sidling up. Two more men were with the publisher, and Shayne looked them over carefully. One of them was in his forties, with light brown hair and a diffident look about him. He tailed slightly behind Sanger and the other man.

That other man had to be Troy Dalton, Shayne thought. He was tall and lithe and moved with the practiced grace of an athlete. Or a man who relied on his body to keep him alive. His hair was dark and thick, and a moustache adorned his upper lip. His clothes were casual, but he made them look expensive. As he came closer, though, Shayne could see the evidence of dissipation in the man's face. He looked like he was in shape, but that look was an illusion. Dalton had let himself go to seed after retiring from the business of soldiering for whoever could pay his price.

Sanger stepped up to Shayne and said, "I wanted you to meet two more friends of mine. This is Troy Dalton, Mr. Shayne, the author of our next blockbuster bestseller. Troy, this is Michael Shayne."

"The famous shamus, eh?" Dalton said, and though there was no sneer on his face, there was definitely one in his voice. He didn't offer to shake hands.

Sanger hurried on, "And this is my vice-president, Thomas Johnson."

Johnson did shake hands with Shayne, and his grip was firm. He nodded and smiled, then stepped back, assuming what he must have taken to be his rightful place. A man like Dalton would want all the limelight for himself.

Dalton was regarding Shayne coldly, and after a moment, he turned to Sanger and said, "Don't think you're fooling me, Martin. I know why Shayne is here."

"I'm here for a vacation," Shayne said flatly, "and to speak to the passengers about the work of a real-life private investigator. They invited me to sit on a panel —"

"Goddammit, don't give me that!" Dalton's voice was low, but it was packed with anger and arrogance. "Martin hired you to nursemaid me because of those stupid threats. Well, you might as well forget it,

Shayne. I've always handled my own troubles, and I can handle anything that comes better than some two-bit private snooper. Do you understand?"

Sanger looked a little sick, and so did Johnson. The publisher said quickly. "Now, I told you, Troy, that I didn't hire Mr. Shayne, I only met him when I fell in the water —"

Dalton's lips twisted, and now the sneer was on them in full force. He cut Sanger off with a curt, "You remember what I said, Shayne. Stay out of my way."

Shayne's voice was every bit as cold as Dalton's. "You think what you want to, mister. I'm here for a vacation. And you can stay out of my way." He took Lucy's arm and brushed past the former mercenary, striding away quickly. He saw the look of distress on Sanger's face as they left, though.

When they were out of earshot, Lucy said worriedly, "That man is going to give you trouble, Michael."

"I know that, Angel," Shayne said. "I know it."

V

BY NIGHTFALL, THE *CARIBE QUEEN* WAS WELL OUT TO SEA, and Miami had long since disappeared behind it. Shayne had managed to keep an eye on Dalton without being too conspicuous about it. He kept his distance from the mercenary-turned-author, since he suspected that Dalton would welcome a chance to cause a scene. That was the last thing Shayne wanted.

Dinner was at 7:30. Shayne dressed in the best suit he had brought with him and then knocked on Lucy's door. He had to suppress a whistle of admiration when she opened the door. She was dressed in a spectacular outfit that left one of her creamy shoulders bare, and she looked stunningly lovely with her dark brown hair pinned up. Shayne said, "You're going to make it hard to watch Dalton, Angel. I won't want to take my eyes off of you, and neither will any other man there."

She smiled prettily and said, "Michael, you make a girl *feel* lovely, whether she is or not. Shall we go?"

"By all means."

Shayne gave their names to a steward as they entered the dining room, and the man directed them to a large table that occupied a commanding position in the luxurious room. Lucy whispered to Shayne, "Michael, that's the Captain's table!"

"So it is," Shayne returned. He was checking the room out for any signs of possible danger, but everything seemed normal. Many of the

tables were already occupied, and the level of conversation in the room was high. Shayne took Lucy's arm and escorted her to their table, finding place cards that seated them about halfway down from the head. They were the last ones to take their seats.

A few moments later, a tall man with iron-gray hair and moustache, wearing sharply-creased blue pants and a dazzling white jacket, took his place at the head of the table. He remained standing for a moment, smiling slightly at his guests. There was a no-nonsense air about him. He said, "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Captain Joshua Debrett, and I'm very pleased to be dining with you. I hope you all enjoy your trip with us, and feel free to call on me or one of my crew should you experience any problems."

A waiter arrived then with a bottle of fine champagne, and Debrett sat down as the vintage wine was served. Shayne sipped from the glass that was placed in front of him and savored the quality of the champagne.

He had spotted Sanger, Dalton, and Johnson as soon as he had come into the big room. They were seated together at one of the other tables, about twenty feet away. Shayne had a clear view of them from his position, for which he was glad, and the pistol snuggled in its holster under his left arm was loaded and ready for any trouble.

He had also checked out the other people at the captain's table as soon as he had sat down. There had been a lot of introductions passing back and forth, and Shayne's mind had automatically catalogued the information about his fellow passengers, even though in all likelihood it would prove to have no bearing on the case. The others at the table seemed mostly to be writers. Directly across the table from Lucy and himself was a slender, distinguished college professor from Texas, who also wrote bestselling spy thrillers. Next to him was a man who wrote macabre suspense novels, who was also an instructor in the martial arts. Shayne resolved to keep an eye on that one; such a background might be a good cover for another violent profession. Down at the end of the table was a husband-and-wife writing team, the woman very attractive with long brown hair and lovely blue eyes, the man looking every inch an author with a full black beard shot through with gray. Sitting next to Lucy and engaging her in animated conversation was a man with sparkling eyes, an infectious smile, and the build of a dancer. Lucy seemed to be enjoying herself immensely as she laughed at his seemingly-endless supply of anecdotes about the writing game.

SHAYNE LET THE EBB AND FLOW OF THE CONVERSATION wash around him, seldom taking part in it. For the most part, he

watched his charges at the other table. Dalton was drinking heavily, which Shayne didn't like. Protecting a drunk was always harder. Sanger seemed to be worried, too, and Shayne saw him snapping frequently at Johnson.

The food was magnificent, Shayne found, the thick steak being the equal to any he had ever gotten in Miami's Beef House, where he often ate. Even though he was working, he was enjoying himself, too. His mind began to play with the hope that nothing would happen on this cruise, that all of Sanger's worries would turn out to be false alarms.

But he knew better than to believe that, deep down. His gut feeling that there would be trouble was just too strong to ignore.

Lucy turned to him and said, "Oh, Michael, this is wonderful. We should have gone on a cruise a long time ago."

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself, Angel."

"How could I help but enjoy myself? Everything is so nice." Her voice lowered. "And this man is so entertaining, and he knows practically everyone. Did you know that he's written so many books that he's known as the Fastest Typewriter in the East?"

"I heard about a guy who was called the Fastest Typewriter in the East one time," Shayne grunted. "He was a hitman for the Mob who used a submachine gun"

Captain Debrett said from his place at the head of the table, "When are you going to be speaking, Mr. Shayne? I didn't see your name on the schedule."

Shayne had seen an informal schedule of events on the ship's bulletin board, and he had been glad when he didn't find his name. The cover story Sanger had dreamed up wasn't being disputed by the organizers of the cruise, and he guessed that the publisher had pulled some strings to get their tacit approval. But Shayne wasn't used to giving talks of any kind, and he hoped the need to do so wouldn't arise. He hesitated before replying to the captain's question, trying to find some noncommittal answer, and a sudden interruption abruptly attracted everyone's attention.

STUART CONWAY, THE SUSPENSE NOVELIST, HAD COME into the room, speaking loudly to a steward who had stopped him momentarily at the door. Conway brushed past the crewman and headed straight for the table where Dalton and Sanger were sitting. There was only a slight weave in his walk, but Shayne had seen enough people who were drunk to recognize the little signs.

"I want to talk to you!" Conway exclaimed before he reached the table. Shayne was watching him closely, sitting forward and getting

ready to move if need be, and he saw that Conway was looking at Sanger, not Dalton. Conway raised a finger and pointed it accusingly at the publisher. "There's . . . a few things I want to tell you . . . Sanger!"

Several of the stewards were moving forward now, sensing that there might be trouble. Sanger was watching Conway advance toward him. His hands were on the table in front of him, pressing down hard. He looked annoyed and slightly afraid at the same time.

"Take it easy, Stuart," Sanger said quietly, and in the hush that had fallen over the room, Shayne had no trouble making out the words. "You know I'll talk to you any time you want, but not here, all right?"

"Yes, here," Conway insisted. "We've got a few things to settle!"

Dalton was looking unconcerned, still eating and sipping his wine as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. Beside him, Johnson watched the proceedings nervously. Sanger, his boss, swallowed and said, "Now, Stuart, I know we've had our differences —"

"Differences, hell!" Conway exploded. "You're nothing but a god-damn crook!"

The stewards were still several feet away, and Conway moved before they could reach him. He launched a punch at Sanger, but he drew back so far before throwing it that Sanger had plenty of time to dodge it. Conway lost his balance when the blow missed, and by then, Shayne was on his feet and moving around the table. He got to Conway about the same time one of the stewards did.

Shayne grabbed Conway's arm as Captain Debrett barked out orders to his men. It would have been easy for him to deck Conway, Shayne knew, but he held his knobby fist back. Instead, he grasped the man's other arm and held him tightly. Conway thrashed a little, calling Shayne several obscene names, and his drunken struggles were too feeble to do any good.

"It looks as if you've come to my rescue again, Mr. Shayne," Sanger said. "I don't know what came over poor Stuart —"

"I do," a female voice said dryly, and Shayne looked over to see Edwina Highland sitting at the next table. "You'll have to tell Mr. Shayne all about it sometime, Martin."

Sanger swallowed again and started to say something else, but Shayne ignored him. The steward said, "I'll take Mr. Conway back to his cabin, sir. I think he needs to lie down."

"Good idea," Shayne said, letting Conway go as the steward moved in. The crewman didn't move quite fast enough, though, and Conway lashed out with one fist, lunging toward Sanger.

The punch slammed into Sanger's nose, and though it hadn't

traveled very far or very fast, the impact was enough to send blood trickling down onto Sanger's lips. Sanger grabbed his injured nose while the steward grabbed Conway, who was drunkenly exultant now that he had struck a blow in whatever cause was driving him.

Shayne saw the steward grasp Conway roughly and then hand him over to another two crewmen who had come running up. Sanger was gasping in pain, and Shayne said, "You all right?"

"I think he broke my nose! That maniac!"

The steward moved in and said smoothly, "We'll have the ship's doctor look at it right away, Mr. Sanger. Why don't you let me take you back to your cabin, and I'll send for the doctor."

"That's a good idea," Shayne agreed. "You seem to attract trouble, Sanger."

"Yes," Sanger said, his voice muffled by the hand over his face. "Help me back to my cabin, please."

SHAYNE DIDN'T THINK THE PUBLISHER WAS REALLY HURT badly, but he humored him and helped him stand up. The steward was on the other side of Sanger, and between them, they got him started toward the exit. The dining room was settling back down to normal after Conway's attack on Sanger, and the sound of talking and laughing was almost as high as it had been before as Shayne and the steward helped Sanger into the corridor leading back to the staterooms.

"I think I can handle it from here on out, sir," the steward said to Shayne. "Thank you for helping."

"No problem." Shayne studied the young man for a moment. A name tag that read LELAND was on his burgundy jacket. The steward was an open-faced young man, with sandy hair and an efficient air about him. Sanger would be in good hands, Shayne decided. He wanted to get back to where he could see Dalton again.

"I'll talk to you later, Sanger," Shayne said, then swung back into the dining room. He stopped in his tracks as he looked at the table where Sanger had been seated.

Dalton and Johnson were nowhere to be seen.

Shayne cursed under his breath and hurried back to the captain's table. Pausing beside Lucy's chair, he asked her in low tones, "Did you see where Dalton and Johnson went?"

She looked up at him anxiously. "Back towards the main deck, I think. Dalton was the one who got up to leave first, Michael, as soon as you were gone."

"That damn fool. He thinks he's got to prove something"

Shayne hurried toward the exit on the other side of the room, the

one that led back to the deck. He ignored the puzzled, intense look that Captain Debrett gave him. Maybe he was making people suspicious of his actions. There wasn't time to worry about that, though. The business with Conway could have been a diversion to get him out of the way. And since Dalton had so obligingly left the safety in numbers of the dining room to go out onto the well-lit deck that would be nearly deserted right at the moment . . . Well, he wasn't going to take any chances, Shayne knew. He hurried down the corridor.

"Please, Mr. Dalton, let's go back inside. I wasn't finished with my dinner."

Shayne could hear Johnson speaking up ahead. He emerged onto the deck and saw the two of them, standing by the rail several yards away.

"You go back if you want to," Dalton said, his voice scornful. "I don't need you to hold my hand, Johnson. And since that's all you're good for . . ."

Shayne opened his mouth to call to them, saw the movement in the shadows beyond them. He launched himself forward, yelling, "Get down!"

A tongue of flame licked out of the shadows. There was no blast of a gun, just a dull, muffled sound. Something whipped past Shayne's head.

He dove at Dalton, hitting the man's legs and knocking him sprawling to the deck. Johnson was already diving for cover, alerted by Shayne's warning, as more angry bees buzzed through the air around them. Dalton let out an indignant yell and started to raise up. Shayne shoved him down again, jerking his gun out with his other hand.

He snapped a shot into the shadows, but the sound of it spanging harmlessly off of metal came to him clearly. There were running footsteps in the darkness, and they faded to nothingness as Shayne surged to his feet, gun ready to fire again. Whoever the sniper was, he must know the ship well. Shayne knew he would never catch him now, so there was no point in giving chase.

No one seemed to have heard Shayne's shot, and the sniper's gun had been silenced. With any luck, Shayne thought, they might keep the knowledge of this little incident away from the Captain. That steely-eyed individual would be persistent if he knew anything was going on, Shayne was sure of that, and he would only complicate matters.

Johnson came out from behind the scant safety of a deck chair and said, "I tried to get him to stay in the dining room, Mr. Shayne, but as soon as you had left with Mr. Sanger —"

"So you're not working for Sanger, eh, Shayne?" Dalton growled, standing up and brushing himself off. "Listen, shamus, I know I've got enemies who want me dead, but I can handle it! And if you get in my way . . . well, I might just mistake you for one of those enemies. You understand what I mean, Shayne?"

Shayne understood, all right. All too well . . .

VI

"ISN'T IT A LOVELY MORNING, MICHAEL?" LUCY ASKED, leaning on the rail and looking out at the placid blue sea.

Shayne nodded. It felt good to just stand there and let the late morning sun warm him. There was a gentle zephyr blowing, and again he thought how pleasant this cruise would have been had he not been working. He would definitely have to give some thought to taking another one sometime, when there wasn't a case involved.

He had already checked on Dalton. The author was fine, none the worst for the incident of the night before. He and Johnson were off down the deck now, watching a bevy of bikini-clad lovelies taking advantage of the ship's pool. The man had been surly during Shayne's brief conversation with him earlier, but at least he wasn't trying to make Shayne's job more difficult. He was staying in clear view of the big redhead. Shayne hadn't seen Sanger yet this morning, but he had to be around somewhere. He hadn't answered a knock on his stateroom door.

Lucy was wearing shorts and a halter this morning, an outfit that seemed to be made for her fine figure. Shayne could have spent a long time just appreciating that view, but as he scanned the passenger-crowded deck, he spotted the four people to whom Sanger had introduced him the day before. Edwina Highland, the blonde novelist, was strolling along the deck in slacks and an open-throated shirt. Further along, wearing a sunsuit that left most of her tanned body uncovered, was Priscilla Stanton. She was comforting Stuart Conway, who reclined in the deck chair next to Priscilla's. He had a hand over his eyes, covering them from the bright sun, and Shayne decided he must have quite a hangover, considering how drunk he had been when he barged into the dining room and took a poke at Sanger. Finally, leaning on the rail and staring out to sea was David Carter, the competitor of Sanger's who was evidently doing none too good. Shayne considered the four of them for a moment, then said to Lucy, "I think I'd better go do a little bit toward earning my fee. I'll meet you for lunch in a half-hour or so, Angel."

Lucy smiled. "All right, Michael. Maybe I can find a nice handsome steward to show me around the ship while you're busy."

"Just so long as he's not too handsome," Shayne chuckled.

EDWINA HIGHLAND HAD STOPPED AT A PORTABLE BAR that was set up close to the swimming pool, and Shayne sidled in that direction. He stepped up beside her and said to the bartender, "Martell, ice water on the side." Turning to Edwina, he went on, "Morning, Miss Highland. Enjoying the trip so far?"

Her smile was thin. "Hello, Mr. Shayne. I suppose I'm enjoying myself as much as I could expect to, with a snake aboard the same ship."

"A snake?" Shayne raised his eyebrows. "I don't think I know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about your employer, Mr. Shayne. Martin Sanger."

Shayne shook his head. "You've got that wrong. I barely know the man."

"Come now, Mr. Shayne — Mike. May I call you Mike? You don't expect Martin's subterfuge to fool me, do you? Martin obviously hired you to come along as a bodyguard."

The bartender was placing Shayne's drink in front of him and without missing a beat, the private detective picked up the glass and swallowed a long sip of the smooth cognac. He smiled and said, "Now why in the hell would Sanger hire me as a bodyguard?"

"To keep someone from sticking a knife in him, of course."

Shayne shrugged. "This is the first I've heard about it. You mean to say that somebody on this cruise might be holding a grudge against Sanger?"

Edwina's laugh was brittle. "All right, I'll play along. It doesn't matter to me. I don't intend to harm Martin, though I've got plenty of reason to. I don't want to kill off all those nice alimony payments."

"You were married to Sanger?"

"For nearly ten years, back when he was a struggling publisher and I was a struggling novelist. Martin got successful before I did and decided he didn't want a wife hanging around his neck anymore. Do you mean to say he really didn't tell you all this when he hired you?"

Shayne sipped the cognac again as Edwina took a healthy swallow of her drink. He said truthfully, "Sanger never told me one word about the two of you being married before. This is interesting, though. If I was working for Sanger, like you insist, I'd want to know who else on board might have a motive to go after him. I suppose Stuart Conway would be on that list. Near the top of it, I'd say."

"After last night's performance, how could you think anything else? Stuart's held a grudge against Martin for years. Stuart's first big book was also his first bestseller Sanger Press ever had. Martin made a fortune off of it. Stuart did all right, too, but then another house offered him a huge advance for his next one. He couldn't take the offer, though. His contract on the first book with Martin called for Sanger Press to do his next two books. Martin was able to pick them up for a lot less than Stuart would have made going with another publisher. It was all perfectly legal, of course, and just good business on Martin's part. But he didn't have to gloat over it and constantly rub Stuart's nose in the situation. I suppose Stuart began to hate Martin about the same time I did."

Shayne nodded. "This is all new to me. Are there others?"

"There are probably two dozen people on this ship with reason to dislike, or hate, Martin, Mr. Shayne," Edwina said. "He's a ruthless man, caring only about his business and how much money he can make. He wasn't always that way. People used to be his main concern. Now he runs roughshod over everyone, the people who work for him as well as his competitors."

"Competitors like David Carter?" Shayne prodded.

Edwina smiled again. "Oh, you are a good one, Mike. You've had a lot of practice at getting people to tell you things. But you forget that I'm a mystery writer. We know the same tricks as you private eyes."

"I'm sure of that," Shayne said dryly.

"Your comment about David Carter is on the mark, though. His house has always been a small one; but the quality of its books was high enough to offset that. Until the last few years, when the company began to slip. It's gone steadily downhill and may even fold before the end of the year; coming on this cruise is really an effort on David's part to lure some of his old authors back. He lost most of his money-makers over the past few years."

"Lost them to Sanger Press, I'll bet."

"Shrewd guess. Martin stole them away. David tried to compete with him, but it was never really a contest. David is just too nice a man to stay in the same ring with a killer like Martin."

"You call Sanger a killer," Shayne said, "and yet you say that he hired me to keep *him* from being killed."

Edwina drowned the rest of her drink. "Well," she said, running her tongue over her moist lips, "everyone has a breaking point. Maybe Martin is afraid one of his enemies has reached it. It's certainly possible."

Shayne nodded. "Anything is possible."

"Yes, it is, isn't it?" Her eyes appraised him coolly. "Would you care to go back to my stateroom with me and test that theory?"

Shayne smiled. "Sorry. I've got a date for lunch in a few minutes."

"Your loss," Edwina shrugged. "For once, though, I was hoping I could beat Pris Stanton to the most attractive man in the crowd. You saw her eyeing you yesterday, of course."

"She's an attractive woman," Shayne said easily. "Does she have it in for Martin Sanger, too, or is she too busy chasing men to try to kill them?"

"Oh, Pris is a killer, too, Mike, and you'll find that out if she ever gets you alone long enough. She used to be a senior editor for Martin, after he divorced me. I don't think she got the job because of her literary acumen. I know she took it very badly when he fired her. He had gotten tired of her, of course, and found someone else to take her place. And little Pris remembers a hurt for a long time. Don't give her a chance to get mad at you, Mike."

"I'll remember the advice."

"You're sure about that lunch date of yours?"

Shayne nodded.

"Oh, well. I'm sure I'll see you later. People can't help but run into each other on a ship, can they?"

She turned and strode away quickly, not looking back. Shayne regarded her retreating figure for a moment, then finished his cognac. That had certainly been an interesting conversation. Sanger had conveniently omitted any mention of his own troubles and enemies when he outlined the situation for Shayne. It seemed from what Edwina had said that nearly everyone on the boat had crossed Sanger's path, to their disadvantage, at one time or another. Shayne wondered how much of it was true, and how much of it came from an ex-spouse's vindictiveness.

He had been keeping an eye on Dalton and Johnson, even while Edwina was talking; Dalton was still out in plain sight, in the view of quite a few people but with no one except Johnson really near him. That seemed to Shayne to be about as safe a set-up as he could have asked for. He glanced at his watch, saw that it was nearly time to meet Lucy for lunch. That would have to wait, though, until Dalton went into the dining room as well. Shayne wondered how the arrogant former mercenary would react to an invitation to join them for lunch. Probably not too well —

SHAYNE HEARD THE COMMOTION FROM THE STAIRS leading down to the stateroom deck, and his head jerked around to find the

cause of it. Two people were charging up the stairs. They were vaguely familiar, and when Shayne thought back, he recognized them as the husband-and-wife collaborators who had been at the Captain's table the night before. They were almost running, and though they were calm enough outwardly, Shayne could see the fear and tension in their eyes.

They started to hurry by him, and Shayne reached out to grasp the arm of the heavyset, bearded man. "What's going on?" he snapped, keeping one eye on Dalton.

"I think somebody's been killed," the man replied, obviously keeping a tight rein on his voice. "We've got to find an officer."

"Tell me what you saw," Shayne ordered, his fingers digging into the man's arm.

"He was in his cabin," the pretty woman said. "We went to see him, but he didn't answer. The door was unlocked, though, and we opened it . . . There was blood all over him — " She broke off and squeezed hard on her husband's hand.

"You're Shayne, the private eye, aren't you?" the man asked. "You'd better get down there, since you knew him."

Somehow, Shayne knew what the man was going to say next. He was right.

"It was Martin Sanger, the publisher. And he sure as hell looked dead to me."

VII

SANGER WAS DEAD, ALL RIGHT. SHAYNE COULD SEE THAT as soon as he knelt beside the body that was sprawled in the middle of the cabin. Sanger's hands were still pressed to his midsection, hiding part of the ugly red blot that had stained his shirt.

As soon as he heard the news, Shayne had grabbed Thomas Johnson's arm and told him to stay with Dalton, not to let the author out of his sight. As he ran down the stairs, then, toward Sanger's stateroom, the thought that this was a diversion rang through his mind insistently. He knew it was a possibility, but dammit, he couldn't stay up on deck when Sanger might be dead down below.

Shayne reached the stateroom just seconds ahead of a steward, and the ship's doctor was right behind the steward. Shayne stood up from his kneeling position beside the body to let the doctor at it. Further down the hall, some of the passengers were watching the goings on in morbid fascination. Though crime and suspense were what these people wrote about and published, many of them had never been this

close to an actual murder before. Many of them had probably never seen a corpse, except in the artificial atmosphere of a funeral home or church.

The doctor sighed heavily and stood up. He turned to the steward and said, "You'd better go get the Captain, Leland. This man's dead." He glanced over sharply at Shayne. "What are you doing here, sir? You should get back. Everyone should clear this corridor, in fact!"

In a low voice that wouldn't carry to the onlookers, Shayne said, "I worked for this man. My name is Mike Shayne, and I'm a private detective. This is one of the things I was supposed to keep from happening."

"Well, you didn't do a very good job of it, did you?" the doctor sniffed.

Shayne kept his anger in check and asked, "What was the cause of death?"

"I'm not supposed to tell anyone but the Captain — "

Shayne's lips drew back in a grimace. Rage was smoldering in his eyes, and the doctor must have seen it, as he said, "I'll take the responsibility. It was a stab wound, wasn't it? It sure didn't look like a bullet did it, from what I saw."

The doctor nodded shakily. "You seem to know what you're talking about, Mr. Shayne. I'm no medical examiner or coroner, but to me, it surely looks like a stab wound. Caused by a knife with a fairly small blade, I'd say, that was inserted and then ripped sideways."

"How long ago did it happen?"

"Oh, I really couldn't say — "

"Then you can tell me whether or not you agree with my guess. Sometime last night, at least eight hours ago, right?"

The doctor inclined his head. "You *have* been around violent death a lot, haven't you?"

"It comes with the territory," Shayne grated. His mind was racing. He wished he had tried that door earlier when Sanger failed to answer it. Of course, it wouldn't have made any difference to the publisher; he had been dead for quite a while by then. But Shayne might have had a chance to keep things quiet if he had found the body. Now the whole ship would know about it.

SOMETIME LAST NIGHT, sometime after Shayne had helped Sanger from the dining room following the attack by Conway, someone had stabbed the publisher in the belly and left him there to die. Sanger Press might eventually publish Troy Dalton's book, Shayne didn't know about that, but Martin Sanger would be dead and buried and

would never see a cent of the sure profits.

But the question that was filling Shayne's mind right now was one of motive. Had Sanger been killed to stop publication of the book, or because he was a callous, ruthless bastard who alienated many of his companions in the publishing world?

Shayne knew one thing. He wasn't going to have much time to find out the answer to that question.

Captain Debrett exclaimed from behind them, "What the devil is going on here?"

The doctor explained quickly that Sanger was dead, that he had been murdered, and Debrett barked, "I can see that. What are you doing here, Shayne? I want this area cleared."

"I'm here because I was working for Sanger," Shayne answered. "He was afraid something like this might happen, and I'm sorry to say, he was right."

"Well, in that case, your job is over, isn't it? I'll have to ask you to leave the area until we get this straightened out, Shayne."

Shayne shook his red head slowly. "I'm afraid not. I'm going to find out who killed him, Captain." It was a flat statement, precluding any argument.

He got one from Debrett, anyway. Shayne forced back his anger as the Captain again ordered him to leave the area. He just kept shaking his head and said, "I'm going to have a look around this cabin, Captain. It was my job to protect Sanger, and somehow I failed him. I'm going to find out what happened."

Debrett looked intently at Shayne for a long moment, perhaps seeing his own icy resolve reflected in the eyes of the big investigator. Finally, he said, "Very well. But I'll be keeping an eye on you, Shayne, and if you step so much as an inch out of line, the authorities will hear about it when we get to port."

"Fair enough," Shayne grunted. "Are you heading back to Miami?"

Debrett shook his head. "We're as close to our first port-of-call as we are to Miami now. We'll go ahead, and when we dock tomorrow, I'm turning the whole thing over to the police. It'll be up to the company whether or not we continue with the cruise."

A couple of stewards had covered Sanger's body with the spread from the bed, but that was all that had been touched in the room except the body. Shayne took his look around now, with Debrett hovering right beside him. The place had been searched, Shayne saw, thoroughly and professionally. He didn't know if the captain recognized the same thing or not, but Shayne didn't volunteer the informa-

tion. Nothing seemed to be missing from the stateroom, though. There was quite a bit of money in Sanger's luggage, in both cash and travelers' checks, and he had several watches and rings that looked quite valuable. Whoever had killed the publisher, and whoever had searched the room, assuming that it had been the same person, hadn't been after loot. The object of the search was something else entirely.

Shayne thought he had a good idea what that something was. He nodded to Debrett and said, "I'll try to stay out of your way, Captain. But I'm going to be poking around in this case. I've got until the time we dock tomorrow to crack it, right?"

"I don't remember saying that," Debrett snapped. "But all right, I suppose it won't do any harm for you to look into it. You're a professional at this sort of thing, after all. Just see that you don't tamper with any of the evidence, sir. The company will have my hide if I let this thing get out of hand."

"I'll be careful," Shayne said. A grim smile stretched his lips. "You can ask Chief Painter back in Miami Beach. He'll tell you how much I respect evidence and policework."

HE STRODE AWAY FROM THE CABIN A FEW MINUTES LATER, leaving Debrett, the doctor, and several other officers there to decide what to do with the body. Crew members had cleared the hall outside of spectators, and stewards stood guard at either end of the corridor for the moment. The one by the stairs to the main deck gave Shayne a hard look as the detective started up, but he didn't attempt to stop him.

Shayne was late for that lunch date with Lucy, he knew, but surely she had heard by now what had happened. Word of murder always got around fast, even on a huge ship like this one. She wouldn't be expecting him now; she had been part of his life long enough to know that he would be working.

There was a pall hanging over the deck, even though it was crowded still, and the sun was still shining warmly overhead. Nothing like a killing to put a damper on things, Shayne thought. He looked for and found Dalton and Johnson, standing by the rail now.

"Is it true?" Johnson asked anxiously as Shayne came up to them. "Is Martin dead?"

"I'm afraid so," Shayne said bleakly. "Someone stabbed him."

Johnson was pale as he shook his head. "Awful, awful . . . I've been with the firm since Martin started it, you know. I just can't believe he's . . . dead."

"Believe it," Dalton said, his voice cold. "When someone rips your gut open, you die, pal. I used to see a lot of that in my line of work."

How about you, Shayne?"

"I've seen it," Shayne said slowly. "But I never got used to it, like you seem to have, Dalton. It's not just a joke to me. I'm going to find whoever did it."

"Well, good luck. It doesn't matter to me, so long as my book still gets published."

Shayne saw the loathing in the look that Johnson shot toward Dalton. He felt the same thing himself. He swallowed the bad taste that was welling up in his throat and said, "Listen, Johnson, I need your help. Take Dalton back down to his cabin and sit on him. Don't let him out, and don't let anybody in except me or the Captain, understand?"

Johnson started to say, "I'll try, Mr. —" when Dalton cut him off angrily.

"Listen, Shayne, you can't order me around, even if you're not trying to hide the fact that you were working for Martin anymore. I'll do what I damn well please and go where I want." He started to brush past Shayne, but he had only taken a step when the knobby fingers of the detective dug into his shoulder.

"You listen, Dalton!" Shayne said. "Maybe you could take me, and maybe you couldn't. But you need all the friends you can get right now. You might be next on the killer's list, remember. I'm going to keep you alive until this cruise is over, whether you like it or not. Now do what I told you!"

For a moment, Shayne thought that Dalton was going to swing on him, and he would have welcomed the opportunity to deck the ex-mercenary. But then Dalton swallowed and jerked out of Shayne's grip. "Come on, Johnson," he said shortly. "You may not be much company, but I guess you're better than nothing."

"I'll be down later," Shayne said to Johnson, as the two of them started to walk away. Johnson nodded. He still looked unhappy about being saddled with Dalton, and Shayne didn't blame him.

SHAYNE SWUNG AROUND AND SCANNED THE DECK, and the first thing that caught his eye was Edwina Highland, standing about twenty feet away, gripping the railing tightly and staring out at the gentle blue waves.

He walked over to her and said, "Looks like you were right about someone not liking Sanger."

Her head jerked around, her eyes fixing him like twin bayonets. "Don't you dare joke about it!" she blazed. "Martin was a heartless bastard, but he was a good man once, good enough that I married him. Good enough that I loved him" Her voice broke.

"Take it easy," Shayne said. He put a hand on her shoulder, and she didn't pull away. "I wasn't joking. In fact, I just jumped all over someone else for not taking it seriously enough. I'm going to find out who did it, Edwina. It's not going to be pleasant, though."

She looked back at him, suddenly suspicious. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm going to have to ask a lot of questions. Like, what were you doing last night?"

She gaped at him. "You want an alibi from *me*?"

"You said earlier that you hated him."

Her anger was cold now, rather than hot, as she said, "All right. If all you can understand is what people *say*, rather than how they *feel* . . . I don't have an alibi. I ate dinner at the same time everyone else did, then I went to one of the lounges for some drinks and a little dancing. I suppose someone might remember seeing me there, but I wasn't *with* anyone. No one could swear that I didn't slip out."

"And afterwards?"

"I went back to my cabin. Alone. No one offered any invitations, and it was a little early in the cruise for me to start picking just anyone up. So, I suppose that until I started talking to you this morning, no one can swear as to my whereabouts."

Shayne nodded thoughtfully. "All right. I'm sure I'll be talking to you later — "

"I'm sure you will."

"I don't think you did it," Shayne said flatly. "And I'm sorry he's dead. For whatever it's worth."

He started to turn away, but she reached out and put a hand on his arm. "Mike . . . Thank you."

IN SHORT ORDER, SHAYNE LOCATED AND TALKED to Stuart Conway, David Carter, and Priscilla Stanton. None of the conversations yielded anything particularly useful, though.

Conway didn't seem sorry that Sanger was dead, but the very fact that someone had died seemed to have shaken him up, made him more aware of his own mortality. He had no alibi for the night, either, claiming that he had gone back to his cabin after being hustled out of the dining room, where he had gotten even drunker than he had been when he attacked Sanger. His temper flared up when he realized just where Shayne's line of questioning was going, and he stalked off furiously.

David Carter, on the other hand, seemed genuinely sorry. "We had our differences, Marty and I," he said, "but I never really held anything against him. Whoever did it . . . Well, I just don't see how a per-

son could kill another person like that."

"Would you mind telling me where you were after dinner last night?" Shayne asked.

"Not at all. I know you detectives have to ask questions like that. I played some cards in the saloon with some of the fellas, then went back to my stateroom and went to bed." He shrugged. "I heard that Marty was killed sometime after midnight. I was back in my room by then, so I suppose I don't have an alibi. I guess I should be worried about that."

"A lot of people don't have alibis," Shayne said noncommittally.

He moved on to Priscilla Stanton. Like Conway, she seemed shaken by the fact that death had struck so close, but she had no kind words to say about the dead man. With a careless motion of her pretty bare shoulders, she said, "Martin Sanger was a creep, Mr. Shayne, and I'm not going to mourn him for a second. But I didn't kill him, if that's what you're thinking. I'm a lover, not a killer."

"So what were you doing last night, if that's the case?"

She laughed. "Hey, even the kid strikes out once in a while, right?" A sudden fierce look came onto her face, spoiling its beauty. "Look, you want to go around being the bigshot shamus, that's all right with me. I don't give a damn. But the only people I'm talking to officially are the cops, you got that?"

"Sure," Shayne said. "And you'd better be ready to do a lot of talking, lady."

He turned and walked away, leaving her to worry about his last comment. Despite what he said, though, he knew of nothing that tied her in to the murder except her hostility toward Sanger. And it seemed as if most of the passengers on the blasted boat had been hostile toward Sanger.

SHAYNE LOOKED UP AND SAW CAPTAIN DEBRETT HURRYING toward him. There was something in the Captain's eyes that made an icy fingernail scratch down Shayne's spine. He increased his pace toward the uniformed man and said, "What's happened, Captain?"

"Keep your voice down, Shayne," Debrett said, his own tones low. "Come with me."

Shayne frowned in puzzlement, but he fell into step behind Debrett. The Captain led him up toward the bridge, but turned and directed Shayne into a narrow corridor before they got to the control center of the ship.

There was a metal door at the end of the corridor, and a crewman was standing in front of it, looking nervous. Debrett said, "This is a pleasure boat, Shayne. We're not equipped to deal with murders."

Shayne caught the plural immediately. He snapped, "Murders?"

Debrett swallowed hard, a rare crack in his composure. "I came down here to send a wire to the authorities in port." He stopped before the door now and motioned the crewman aside, and Shayne saw from the legend stenciled on the door that this was the ship's radio room. Debrett went on, "When I went inside — "

He swung the door open, and Shayne's face got even more grim as he looked inside. Trenches appeared in his gaunt cheeks, and his hand came up to tug at the lobe of his left ear.

Inside the little room, in a swivel chair in front of the complex radio console, was a young man, blond not more than twenty-five.

And his throat had been slashed, almost from ear to ear.

VIII

"I'M ORDERING EVERYONE ON THE SHIP TO STAY in their cabins," Debrett said a few minutes later. The harried doctor had arrived, for all the good he could do now. The young radio operator was obviously dead and had been for quite some time, to judge by the condition of his body and the stickiness of the blood that was now dried in a huge stain on the front of his uniform shirt.

"I think that's probably a good idea," Shayne said, leaning on the wall of the room and wishing that smoking was permitted here. "There's no way this cruise can go on as a pleasure jaunt until we get these killings cleared up."

"We're not going to get them cleared up," Debrett insisted. "I'm still turning the whole matter over to the police. I'm not going to wait until we reach port, though. I'm radioing ahead for a helicopter to meet us."

"Sorry, skipper," a technician bent over the radio said. "I'm afraid nobody's going to be doing any calling over this radio for a while. Whoever killed poor Baynes disabled the radio, too. I can fix it, but it'll be late tonight or early tomorrow before it's in working order again."

"Blast it," Debrett said through gritted teeth. "I've been the captain of this ship for ten years, and this is the first trouble we've ever had like this."

Shayne watched stoically as several crewmen picked up the body of the dead man and carried it from the little room. When they were gone, he asked, "When did Baynes come on duty?"

Debrett looked to the technician, who was evidently in charge of the radio room, and the man said, "He came on at four and had the duty until noon."

"Was he here by himself?"

"More than likely he was, most of the time anyway. We monitor the weather up on the bridge, and down here, it was the operator's job to listen for distress calls and send any messages that needed sent. If nobody needed to send a wire, then Baynes could have been down here by himself the whole time."

"Except for the killer," Shayne murmured. "Maybe whoever killed him needed a wire sent and didn't want anyone else to know about it."

"Listen, Shayne," Debrett said in a hard voice, "if you know anything about this business that you haven't told me, you'll regret it."

Shayne took a deep breath. "I'm sure you've heard of confidentiality, Captain. But I'll tell you this much. Sanger may not have been the ultimate target of the killer, and I'm sure that boy wasn't. I'd suggest that you place guards over certain cabins."

"And which ones would that be, if it's not confidential?"

"I think Troy Dalton and Thomas Johnson should stay in one cabin, and it should be guarded at all times, for their own protection. As for the others, I'd keep a pretty close eye on Stuart Conway, David Carter, Edwina Highland, and Priscilla Stanton. All four of them had reason to dislike Martin Sanger, even to the point of hating him. And none of them have alibis for the time of Sanger's death; I've already checked that out."

"What reason could any of them have for killing Baynes, though?" Debrett asked. "How would that be connected with Sanger's death?"

Shayne shook his head and ran his thumb along his jaw. "That's something I don't know yet," he admitted. "But I intend to find out."

Actually, he thought as he left the radio room, it could well be that none of the four had anything to do with the murders. There were others who didn't like Martin Sanger, and there was always the Dalton angle to consider. Shayne didn't believe that the mercenary's former employers were just going to sit back and let him embarrass them as he intended. There was a good chance that a professional killer was on board the *Caribe Queen*, and if there was it could be almost anyone. Shayne had to admit that the killings of the radio operator looked like a pro job; slitting a throat so skillfully was a tricky business.

AS HE STRODE BACK OUT ONTO THE MAIN DECK, he saw that crew members were circulating among the passengers, interrupting card games, drinking bouts, and flirtations to politely ask them to return to their cabins for a while. They were being as diplomatic as possible about the unpleasant chore, but still some of the guests were

taking offense. Among them, Shayne noticed, was Stuart Conway, who was protesting loudly about "locked up like this was a damned floating prison." Shayne didn't feel too much sympathy for him.

He felt someone touch his arm, and he turned his head to see Edwina Highland standing beside him. There was a worried look on her attractive face as she said, "Is the rumor true, Mike? Has someone else been killed?"

"I'm afraid so," Shayne nodded. "It was the radio operator, and it looks like he was killed not long after Sanger. The two seem to be related somehow, but we haven't doped it all out yet."

"God." Edwina's voice was a whisper, and a shudder rippled through her. "And this was supposed to be a fun trip. I don't like this, Mike. There's never more than one corpse in my books. It's a rule."

"Murderers never play by the rules," Shayne said.

He sent Edwina on to her cabin, not telling her that she was unofficially at least under suspicion, that a crew member would be watching her stateroom. Considering how she had reacted to his questions earlier, he didn't think she would take such a situation kindly.

He noticed David Carter going toward his cabin, still looking slightly stunned by all that had happened so suddenly. Priscilla Stanton was on her way to her cabin, too, but she was complaining to the steward who was escorting her all the way. Shayne considered the four main suspects who had wished Sanger ill. Conway disliked the publisher enough to take a punch at him, but did that mean he would also kill if the chance came up? He was the volatile type, easily affected by liquor. And Priscilla Stanton seemed to be much the same way, though Shayne hadn't seen her drunk yet. She had a temper, though, that much was obvious. Edwina had sounded particularly bitter toward Sanger, but she also exhibited grief at his death. Shayne gave a mental shrug. He had seen plenty of good actresses before. Carter, on the other hand, hadn't shown any obvious rancor toward Sanger. Sometimes, concealed emotions could be the strongest, Shayne knew. But though all four of them possessed motive and opportunity, Shayne couldn't for the life of him see why any of them would want to kill the radio operator.

He paused suddenly in his aimless walking and put a hand on the rail. A possibility had occurred to him. Baynes had gone on duty about four, and Sanger had been killed sometime before that. The young man could have seen something without even realizing it at the time . . .

A steward spoke beside him. "Excuse me, sir. We're asking all of the passengers to return to their cabins for the time being. I'm sure

you've heard that there's been some trouble — ”

“All right, son,” Shayne replied. “I know all about it. You can check with the Captain if you like, since I’m apt to be wandering up and down the halls for a while, talking to people.”

The steward was frowning, but he said, “Of course. You’re Mr. Shayne, aren’t you? I thought I recognized you.”

Now that he mentioned it, the steward was familiar to Shayne, too. It was the one who had helped him get Sanger out of the dining room. Shayne said, “Tell you what. I’ll go back to my stateroom now, and you can check with the Captain and get the word from him that it’s all right for me to be out of my cabin. Then you can pass it on to the other crew members.”

“All right, Mr. Shayne.” The steward grinned. “Thanks for not giving me a hard time about it. When the Captain gives an order, we just all naturally jump to follow it.”

Shayne didn’t doubt that for a second, considering Debrett’s powerful air of authority. And actually, the Captain had never said that he could have the run of the ship for his investigation. But it never hurt to act like you knew what you were doing.

THE DOOR BETWEEN HIS STATEROOM AND LUCY’S WAS OPEN, and as soon as he came in, she appeared in the door, her face anxious. “Michael, are you all right? I’ve heard so many conflicting rumors about what happened.”

“I’m fine, Angel,” Shayne said, slipping his arms around her, kissing her briefly. “But I’m afraid Sanger is dead, and so is a kid who worked in the ship’s radio room.”

He felt her tremble for a moment as she looked up at him. “What about Dalton?” she asked. “Do you think it was a professional killer, like you were afraid of?”

“I don’t know,” Shayne said bleakly, shaking his head. “It seems that Sanger had a lot of enemies before he ever got hooked up with Dalton, and a lot of them are right here on this boat. It’s a mess, that’s for sure.”

“You’ll straighten it out,” Lucy said softly.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” Shayne grinned. “I wish I was so sure.”

He filled her in on the details of everything that had happened, then said, “I’d better go check on Dalton. I told Johnson to sit on him, and Debrett will have a guard on the door, too. But I want to see the set-up for myself.”

"Be careful, Michael. Murderers sometimes don't know when to stop."

He knew that all too well. But he felt a little better as he approached Dalton's cabin and saw a burly steward standing guard in front of the door. Evidently, the word had gotten around and Shayne's presence had been approved of by the captain, because the guard gave him a tight smile and stepped aside to let him knock on the door.

Dalton jerked it open and exclaimed, "Shayne! I don't believe this! Was this your idea, to hold us prisoner?"

"It's for your own protection," Shayne said shortly. "Or do you want to end up dead too, like Sanger and Baynes?"

"Baynes?" Johnson asked from a chair in the corner.

"The radio operator. He was killed last night, too, and his body was just discovered a little while ago."

"And you think the same person is responsible for both murders?"

"That sounds likely to me. Has there been any trouble, Johnson?"

The publishing house vice-president shook his head. "We came right down here like you told us to, and no one came until the steward outside showed up and told us that he would be guarding the door. I shouldn't have let Troy open the door just now, I know — "

"Don't worry about it," Shayne cut in. "That guy outside looks pretty capable. You two just stay put. I'll be back later. I'm going to go do some prowling around, trying to see what I can find out."

Johnson was shaking his head. "It's all so awful. I can hardly believe Mr. Sanger is dead. I've been with the company from the first, you know. I just . . . can't believe he's gone."

"Yeah, well, you'll be in charge now, buddy," Dalton said. "You'll even get to make some decisions for a change, instead of being Sanger's gofer. Like whether or not you're still going to publish my book. How about it, huh?"

"There'll be time for all that later," Johnson said uneasily. "Right now, all I want to worry about is getting back home."

"Keep that thought in mind," Shayne said. "It'll make you a little more careful."

He left the stateroom, glad to be away from Dalton's grating presence for a while. But his mood rapidly worsened, as he visited all four of his major suspects and found that none of them had an alibi for the crewman's death, either. There were just too many suspects, Shayne reflected sourly, a whole boatload of them.

THE AFTERNOON PASSED QUICKLY, even though nothing useful came of it. Shayne spoke to Debrett again just after the sun dipped

below the waves and reported his lack of progress. Debrett said, "I didn't really expect you to solve the whole thing in one afternoon, Shayne . . . Still, it would have been nice if we had been able to turn *something* up. I've had the purser going around, too, asking questions. It was against my better judgment, but I felt like I had to make some effort."

"How about the radio? Any word on when it'll be operational again?"

"Around midnight, I think. I'm going to request that a helicopter meet us as soon as possible. I want this thing out of my jurisdiction, Shayne. I'm a sailor, not a policeman."

Shayne nodded. There were in the Captain's cabin, and he took a cigarette out and lit it gratefully. Debrett had a foul pipe going, and for a few moments, they sat and smoked silently.

An urgent rapping on the door shattered the quiet. Debrett called, "Come!" Shayne sat up as the door was flung open and a junior officer hurried into the room.

"There's more trouble, sir," the man said breathlessly. "Some one knocked out Higgins. He just came to and reported it."

Shayne looked a question at Debrett, and the Captain snapped, "Higgins is the guard on David Carter's stateroom." Turning back to the officer, he asked, "What about Mr. Carter?"

"I don't know, sir. Higgins said no one answered his knock when he came to, and he didn't want to enter the room without permission."

Shayne was on his feet. "Come on," he barked. "Let's get down there."

Debrett looked daggers at him for a second, but he did as Shayne said. The two men hustled down the corridors, the junior officer trailing along behind. When they reached the door of the stateroom, they found a crewman standing in front of it with a sheepish look on his face.

"I'm sorry, Captain," the man began. "I don't know what happened. Somebody lowered the boom on me from behind — "

"We'll discuss it later," Debrett bit off. He knocked on the door and called. "Mr. Carter! Are you in there?"

When no answer came, Debrett reached down and grasped the knob, turning it sharply and throwing the door open. He stepped into the stateroom, Shayne hard on his heels.

The room was empty.

There was no sign of Carter that they could see at first, but when Shayne spotted the folded piece of paper on a dressing table. He whipped across the little room and picked it up by a corner, shaking it open

so that he could read the writing on it.

His face got even more grim as he read the note. Debrett peered over his shoulder, and after a moment, said, "Well, that pretty well clears things up, doesn't it? We'll search the ship and circle back around, but I don't think we'll find him. Perhaps we can salvage the rest of the cruise after all, now that our murderer's gone."

Shayne looked back at the Captain, his eyes full of doubt, but he didn't say anything. He just scanned the suicide note and confession again. It maintained very plainly that its author, David Carter, had killed Martin Sanger because of Sanger's thefts of Carter's writings, and that he had also killed the radio operator, who had seen him leaving Sanger's cabin after midnight. Unable to live with two killings on his conscience, Carter claimed, he was going to leap overboard to avoid his eventual punishment.

Shayne agreed with Debrett — they wouldn't find Carter on board the ship. Turning around to look for him wouldn't do any good, either.

Dead weights sink very rapidly.

And Shayne was sure that Carter had been dead, a third victim, before he ever left the ship.

IX

SHAYNE LEFT THE STATEROOM WITH HIS MIND FULL of questions. Something had been bothering him, under the surface, ever since Sanger's death had been discovered. Sanger hadn't struck him as an unintelligent man. He would know that he had enemies on this cruise besides the people who wanted to suppress Dalton's book. Would Sanger have opened his door, late last night, to someone who he knew to have reason to hate him, like Carter? Shayne didn't think so . . .

But he would have opened it to someone he knew and trusted.

Shayne wished fervently that the radio was already working. There was a theory floating around in his head now, but it would take communication with New York to confirm it. And there was still at least one piece of the puzzle missing. He had the nagging feeling that he had glimpsed the missing piece at least once, but that it had slipped by him unnoticed.

He shook his head disgustedly and turned his steps toward the stateroom where Dalton and Johnson were staying. He might not be able to confirm all of his suspicions, but he could at least ask a few pointed questions.

As Shayne turned a corner in the corridor and saw the door to the

stateroom down the hall, his eyes narrowed and his step slowed. There was a burly steward who was guarding the door, and standing next to him, a tray of food in his hands, was another uniformed steward. The steward turned his head, saw Shayne approaching, and smiled. "Hello, Mr. Shayne," he said. "Still investigating?"

"Yeah, that's right," Shayne said, looking at the steward's name tag. "Delivering dinner, Leland?"

"Yes, sir. All the passengers are being served in their rooms."

The other steward reached for the doorknob and said, "I guess it's all right or you to go on in with that. People have to eat."

"Just a second," Shayne said, stopping the steward called Leland. "How long have you been working on the *Caribe Queen*, if you don't mind my asking?"

"Not at all, sir," Leland said. "This is my first voyage."

"I thought so," Shayne mused. He reached for the cloth that covered the dinner tray. "What are we eating tonight?"

His hand never got there. Leland's fingers darted under the cloth and snatched something out, then whirled the tray up against the guard's head with a resounding clang. The man started to crumple.

Shayne had taken a step toward Leland, ready to lunge at him, when the steward swung back around and lined the silenced gun in his hand up with Shayne's head. "Hold it!" he snapped. His other hand made a flicking movement, and then he knelt beside the stunned man on the floor. His eyes never left Shayne, and the gun in his hand didn't waver a fraction of an inch, as he slipped the thinbladed knife in his other hand into the helpless man's back.

"Don't worry, he didn't feel a thing," Leland said as he stood up again. "Open that door and haul him inside, Shayne."

"What if I don't?"

"Then I'll shoot you in the throat so that you can't yell and take care of both of you myself."

SHAYNE STOOD STILL FOR A BEAT LONGER, THEN KNELT and grasped the dead man's collar. He opened the door with his other hand.

Leland went through in front of him, and Shayne heard the gasps of surprise inside. He pulled the corpse with him as he went through the door. Leland kicked it shut behind him.

Dalton and Johnson were gaping at the gun in Leland's hand. Shayne straightened up from his grisly task and said, "What's the score on this trip, Leland? Three so far, and still counting?"

Leland grinned, still looking innocuous and pleasant. He said,

"Three so far, with three more coming, Shayne. I would have gotten to you soon enough anyway. Thanks for saving me the trouble."

"What the bloody hell?" Dalton exclaimed, recovering the voice that had been stunned from him. "What's going on here?"

"Your death, stupid," Leland grated at him, losing his pleasant facade. "You didn't really think you could retire from your line of work and then tell all about it in a book, did you? Too many people would be embarrassed."

"But you can't just kill me, just like that!" Dalton's voice was starting to crack, and there was raw fear in his eyes. It had been too long since he had faced death; it had regained its power to terrify him.

"Sure he can kill you," Shayne said bluntly. "He killed that radio operator, Baynes, and then he killed David Carter, trying to set up a scapegoat in order to keep suspicion pointed completely away from him for long enough to do the rest of the job, and he killed this poor sailor just for being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Thomas Johnson had been watching the deadly drama impassively, standing to one side of the room, but now he said, "You didn't mention Mr. Sanger, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne kept his gaze locked on Leland, but he said, "That's because Sanger was killed by someone else entirely, Johnson. You know that."

He heard Johnson's sigh. "I knew it couldn't stay a secret forever. I knew my punishment would catch up to me."

"Hey, that sounds almost like what I made that guy Carter write," Leland said. "You saw the note, didn't you, Shayne?"

"I saw it, all right. Pretty slick job, Leland. The Captain bought it. But I knew that Sanger wouldn't have let Carter in here late at night, and he sure as hell wouldn't have let Carter get close enough to stab him. Someone else had to do that, and it couldn't have been you, because you didn't know where all the copies of the manuscript were. You could have made Sanger tell you before he died, probably, but you didn't have to. You palmed Sanger's key when you helped him back here from the dining room, then came back later to work on him. Somebody else beat you to it, though. When you came in, you found Johnson standing over the body with the knife in his hand. That was just fine for your purposes, since you would have killed Sanger eventually, anyway. Now you had a hold over Johnson, and he knew how many copies of the manuscript there were and where they were, too. Johnson told you about the copy in New York and the copy in my cabin, and you searched Sanger's cabin to make sure there wasn't one there. You let Johnson go after threatening to expose him if he said anything about you being in the room, then you went to the radio room and got

in touch with the people you're working for. You told them about the copy in New York, which they can arrange to have stolen, and you said you'd get the other copy from me. I'll bet you even set up a time for them to pick you up tonight, too. Then all you had to do was frame somebody to keep things muddled up and wait for a good time to kill Dalton. Of course, you were planning to double-cross your unwilling partner, Johnson, and kill him, too."

SHAYNE HAD BEEN TALKING QUICKLY, PUTTING THE THEORY together as he spoke. He had had part of it already, the part about Johnson killing Sanger, and the revelation of Leland as the professional killer hired to dispose of Dalton had tied everything together. Leland had seemed to be always nearby when there was trouble, and Shayne could see now that there had been a good reason for that. He had neatly stage-managed the whole thing, except for the murder of Sanger. And he would have gotten around to that, too.

Leland nodded, smiling again, admiration in his eyes. "You have a knack for figuring things out, Shayne. Too bad it all fell into place too late for you. Too late for any of you. I'm going to get rid of you three, then find that manuscript in your stateroom and slip overboard in a life jacket with no one the wiser. There's a fast boat running without lights a mile to port, and as soon as they get my signal, they'll be along to pick me up. It's all worked out, Shayne. And there's nothing you can do to stop it!"

Shayne thought about Lucy, sitting in the cabin adjoining his, and a cold sweat broke out on his brow. She would hear Leland, would open the door, thinking it was him, and then the killer would have to eliminate her, too. Leland covered all of his tracks, ruthlessly. Shayne had seen plenty of evidence of that.

Dalton was shaking, sweat on his face, too. His eyes were fixed on the gun, and he said, "This is all crazy! You can't mean any of it! I didn't *really* betray anyone. I didn't think they'd try to have me killed —"

"Well, you just didn't think it through, did you, friend?" Leland asked mockingly. He swung the gun toward Dalton, and his finger began to tense on the trigger.

Shayne saw Thomas Johnson's lips moving soundlessly, heard him suddenly say, "Too many deaths," and then the man was leaping forward, crashing into Dalton and knocking him aside. The gun in Leland's hand spat. Johnson cried out and spun around, sliding toward the floor.

Dalton let out a terrified yell even as Shayne threw himself toward

Leland. Shayne lashed out, trying desperately to knock the gun aside. It cracked again, the silencer making the report almost inaudible, and Shayne felt something whip by his ear.

He slammed into Leland, knocking the killer backwards. Out of the corner of his eye, Shayne saw Dalton scrambling toward the door and disappearing through it out into the corridor. His yelling filled the air.

Shayne grabbed for the gun and got a hand on it before Leland could fire again. The man brought his knee up sharply, but Shayne twisted and took the blow on his thigh. The gun was starting to come loose now....

THERE WAS A FLICKER AS SOMETHING SHINY came toward his eyes. Shayne jerked his head back. The knife in Leland's other hand danced in front of his face. Shayne hooked a punch to Leland's stomach, bending the man over almost double, but another wild swing with the knife found its target this time. Shayne felt what seemed like little more than a light punch on his shoulder, but then the burning pain hit him. The knife was lodged in his arm, and as he pulled away, the hilt was torn from Leland's hand.

Shayne's grip on the gun slipped loose as the pain of the wound washed over him. Leland whipped it around and cracked it against Shayne's skull. Shayne felt his feet going out from under him.

Leland could have ended it then, putting a bullet in Shayne's head as he fell, but Dalton was getting away, and Dalton was the real target. There wouldn't be any payoff for Shayne, only for Dalton. Shayne knew that the only thing that saved his life was Leland's greed. Leland whirled around and charged out into the corridor, running after Dalton.

Shayne struggled back to his feet, setting his teeth as he grasped the hilt of the knife and ripped it free. There was a warm, wet feeling on his arm, but he ignored it as he ran shakily out into the hall. His eyes locked on Leland, hurrying up the stairs to the main deck.

If Leland could still manage to hit Dalton, he could go overboard and signal for help to pick him up. There would be witnesses left behind, but the bounty for killing Dalton would be high enough to enable him to start over somewhere, with a new name and maybe even a new face. There would still be a copy of the manuscript in existence, but the people who wanted it destroyed could deal with that later. With Sanger and probably Johnson dead, there would be a long delay in publication, if indeed it was ever published.

Shayne shook his head, telling himself not to worry about all that now. It took all his concentration to make it up the steps. He burst out

onto the main deck, deserted now in the early evening, as all the passengers had their dinners in their cabins.

He had a clear view of the deck, could plainly see Dalton running for his life, still shouting at the top of his lungs. There were answering shouts now, but any help from the crew would be too late for the former mercenary. Because Leland was standing still, his gun leveled, taking aim in the moonlight that was more than sufficient for a capable marksman.

Leland must have heard Shayne coming, because he started to turn his head. His finger pulled the trigger even as Shayne crashed into him, but the bullet went screaming off wildly into the night. A thin scream tore itself from Leland's lips, and he went limp against Shayne, the gun falling from his nerveless fingers even as he followed it to the deck, where he lay in a crumpled heap.

Shayne took a deep breath, feeling the blood pounding in his head. He had seen the look of disbelief in Leland's eyes as they collided, seen the awful realization that even though he had brought death to so many others, it could come to him also. And then he had died, without a word.

Shayne looked down at the knife in Leland's side. He had almost forgotten he had it, and he knew it had been luck as much as anything else that had guided it under the ribs and into the man's heart. Yeah, luck . . .

X

JOHNSON WAS STILL ALIVE WHEN SHAYNE GOT BACK to the stateroom, but the doctor was looking up at Captain Debrett and shaking his head. Debrett saw Shayne and motioned him closer. "He's been asking for you," Debrett said, his eyes widening in surprise as he saw the blood stain in Shayne's sleeve.

Shayne knelt beside Johnson and said, "It's Shayne. What is it, Johnson?"

The man was pale, shivering, but he looked up at Shayne with alert eyes and said softly, "Dalton?"

"He's fine, other than being scared to death. He says he's not going to let anybody publish that book, that his career as an author is over."

Johnson's smile was weak, but it was there. "Good . . . He was a . . . lousy writer . . . anyway . . . what happened to that . . . steward?"

"He's dead," Shayne said flatly. "He won't collect any more bounties."

"Never meant for so many people to die," Johnson said, shaking

his head and closing his eyes. "Didn't mean to kill . . . Mr. Sanger. He just . . . made me so . . . mad."

"Why did you do it?" Shayne asked, bending over Johnson. He thought for a minute that the man was gone, but after long seconds, a murmured answer came back.

"He . . . was going to fire me. Been with the company from the first . . . I helped make it a good house . . . He thought I was too old-fashioned, though. Thought . . . I was washed up . . . I just couldn't take it anymore . . . I used his own letter opener, he was so surprised. That steward, Leland, he said he was going to . . . throw it overboard. But I am sorry . . . didn't know what I was doing . . ."

His head slipped to the side. Shayne and Debrett both looked at the doctor. The doctor shook his head again, this time saying, "He's not dead, just passed out. But don't bet any money that he'll live until we reach port."

Shayne and Debrett stood up and moved away from the unconscious man as the doctor began issuing orders to his assistants in preparation for moving Johnson to the sick bay. Debrett said bitterly, "Is it really all over this time, Shayne?"

"I think it is for you," Shayne replied. "Or it will be as soon as we reach port. There's been enough playing around by Dalton, and Sanger, too. They wanted to keep that manuscript to themselves until it was published, so that they'd have a real blockbuster. Now, Dalton's backing out. Too many people have died for that to happen. It would make it all for nothing."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to take the copy of the manuscript I have and take Dalton, too, and we're flying back to Miami as fast as we can. I've got some contacts, and I think it's time we dumped the whole thing in the Justice Department's lap. They can nursemaid Dalton and do whatever they want to with his manuscript."

Debrett heaved a sigh. "Then the rest of us can get on with the cruise, I take it."

"Yeah, I guess so." Shayne started to turn away wearily, then looked back over his shoulder. "And *bon voyage*, Captain."

HE STOPPED BY THE SICK BAY and had the doctor disinfect and bandage the knife wound in his arm. He could have it looked at more thoroughly when they got back to Miami. He hoped Lucy wouldn't mind cutting the cruise short.

There was no reason she should have to, though, he realized. She could stay with the ship. He had its itinerary. After flying Dalton back

to Miami, he could catch up to the ship later, and they could at least have a few days of vacation.

Shayne wiggled his stiff arm and grinned as he headed down the corridor toward his stateroom. He hadn't had much luck combining business and vacations lately, and he knew just what he was going to do the next time somebody came into the office and tried to get him to take a case in some pleasure garden.

He was going to throw him right out on his butt.

The rest of the trip might not be so bad, though. Who knows, he thought, he might even pick up some new tricks from those crazy mystery writers.

Shayne grinned again and went to tell Lucy all about it.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, MSMM

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE is twenty-five years old. That's right. The first issue (Called MICHAEL SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE) dated September 1956, featured as the lead short novel "Bring Back A Corpse" by Brett Halliday (who else?)

Most magazines don't last five years, much less twenty-five and this fact is a tribute to the staying power of the redhead Miami shamus, and to Lucy Hamilton, Tim Rourke, Will Gentry, Peter Painter and all the gang.

During this past quarter of a century MSMM has given mystery fans a lot of reading pleasure. It will continue to do so. Will MSMM be around twenty-five years from now? I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Stick around. Exciting days are ahead.

— CEF

He had two gripes. He didn't believe that anyone but a cop should be allowed to carry a gun, and he thought that all motorcycles should be limited to traffic officers. If he had his way, there would be a law!

Bucknell's Law

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

HARVEY BUCKNELL CONSIDERED HIMSELF A GOOD POLICE officer. He had been on the force five years now, in the middle-size Midwestern city, and he was still a motorcycle officer. That was all right; he wasn't really sure he wanted to be promoted.

Whereas George Melton, his buddy, was itching to be promoted off the bike, Bucknell was perfectly content at what he was doing.

"What's the push, George?" he said, as they got ready to go on an eight to midnight one hot summer evening. "We serve a function. Somebody has to ride herd on those idiot motorists out there."

"Maybe yours doesn't, but my tail gets tired straddling that saddle for eight hours," George grumbled. "Besides, a promotion means more take-home pay."

Of course George had a wife and two kids around his neck. Not Bucknell. He was free as a bird, and he felt like one astride that powerful bike, helmeted and goggled and booted, the pistol on his hip. He could feel the power surge into him like an electric current through the handle bars, and he was larger than life on the bike. It was a feeling almost sexual in its intensity.

A big man, Bucknell, ruggedly handsome. He didn't want for women. Not all females thought cops were pigs. In fact, the bike and

the uniform turned a lot of them on.

He had two gripes. Both had to do with citizens. He didn't believe that anyone but a cop should be allowed to own and carry a gun, and he thought that all motorcycles should be limited to traffic officers. If he had his way, there would be a law.

Bucknell's law, he liked to think of it with a grim smile.

The reason for gun restrictions was obvious, of course, and most of his fellow officers agreed with him. Less than a month ago, Jim Barlow had stopped a motorist for running a red light. As Jim approached the vehicle, the driver had gunned him down and driven away, leaving Jim to die in the street. So it followed that the life of a cop would be safer without civilians toting guns.

About limiting motorcycles, Bucknell found little agreement.

"Hell, Harve," George said once when they were arguing about it, "a bike is just another vehicle. A citizen has a right to own one."

"Citizen! You know who owns most of 'em? Punks, the longhairs, Hell's Angels, people like that. They ride around breaking traffic laws, tearing up the landscape, then call us pigs if we stop them. No, sir, if I had my way, nobody but cops would be allowed a bike."

"That ever happens, it's going to hurt your ticket writing record considerably."

Bucknell glared. "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing, Harve," George said with a shrug. "But you *do* write a bundle of tickets. The Captain's always using you as an example for the rest of us. And everybody knows you write more tickets to motorcycle riders than any of us."

"Because they deserve it, that's why!"

Bucknell knew that many of his fellow officers thought he was too straight arrow, adhering too strictly to the law. But what was wrong with that? It was his job, and he was proud of his record. Not like some he could name, who often waved an offending motorist on when slipped a ten dollar bill.

They still joshed him about an incident which happened a year ago. He had spotted a vehicle going far over the speed limit, running lights and stop signs. When Bucknell finally got the vehicle pulled into the curb, he found a man behind the wheel, his wife in the back seat having labor pains.

Bucknell gave the man an escort to the hospital, siren screaming, accompanied him inside, waited until his wife was taken care of, then wrote out the ticket. The driver had committed at least a half-dozen violations. The reason for it had no bearing on his deserving a ticket, not in Bucknell's opinion.

IT WAS A FAIRLY DULL EVENING. The heat and a couple of rain squalls had pretty well emptied the streets by ten. Bucknell had written only ten citations, well below his average for a day's work. And there were few motorcycles out; rain usually kept them in.

There was one spot where they liked to gun it pretty good. It was in an industrial district down by the river, virtually no traffic at night.

Bucknell had an intersection he particularly liked. There was a service station on the corner, closed at night. He parked the bike in the shadows at the side of the building, motor idling, and waited patiently. Not ten minutes later he heard one. No mistaking that bull-like roar.

V-room! V-room!

In a moment it came into view. The cycle was an old Harley; it had been changed considerably since leaving the factory. The saddle was low, the handlebars long and high in the air. What the bike freaks called a chopper.

Bucknell judged the biker to be doing at least fifty, and this was a thirty-five mile zone. He waited until the punk was half a block up the street, then he eased his own machine out behind him. Bucknell clocked him for a mile before touching the siren. Yeah, he was doing well over fifty.

At the wail of the siren, the rider ahead glanced back. He seemed to slow for a moment. Then he gunned it.

"Good on you, punk!" Bucknell shouted into the windstream. "Now I'll nail you good!"

BUCKNELL DIDN'T TRY TO OVERTAKE THE OTHER AT ONCE, just matched the pace, hanging back about a block. It was a game of hounds he loved. The other rider didn't have a chance; Bucknell knew that he could overtake him with ease whenever he wished.

He also knew what was coming up. With startling suddenness the buildings were gone, and they were practically out in the country, the road following the curve of the river, which glittered at the foot of a high bluff on their right. They were both doing over seventy when they went into the first curve. Bucknell slowed, slowed enough so he could handle his machine on the slick road surface.

The other rider slowed, but not enough and almost too late. He skidded, slewing back and forth, the motorcycle tilting at a dangerous angle. For a moment Bucknell thought he was going to flip. At that speed he'd break a leg, if not worse.

But he managed to bring it under control. Bucknell decided it was time to end it. He touched the siren and speeded up. Surely the punk

would be frightened enough by his close call to give it up. A mile ahead the road curved again, dipping under the end of the expressway bridge arching over the river.

But instead he gunned it again, pulling away. Startled, and angered now by the other's stupidity, Bucknell also speeded up, the siren wailing.

Then the chopper disappeared around the second curve. Cursing, Bucknell throttled down. He swept around the curve in time to see the chopper skidding all over the road, completely out of control now. The bridge loomed overhead, a thick concrete abutment on each side of the road. Still skidding, sideways now, the chopper smashed into the abutment on the right.

Bucknell heard the tremendous crash over the snarl of his own motor. Before he could reach the wrecked motorcycle, it erupted into a gout of flame. Bucknell braked to a halt and leaped off his machine.

He was too late. He could see the other rider crushed between the chopper and the abutment, his clothing aflame.

THE DEAD YOUTH'S NAME WAS DANNY NORTON.

And his father was Bob Norton, a sergeant on the police force, who had once been a motorcycle officer.

There was no official blame attached to Bucknell for the accident. He had just been doing his job. The skid marks, the awful impact of the motorcycle against the abutment, left no doubt in anyone's mind that Danny Norton had been traveling at a high rate of speed.

And Bucknell felt no guilt. After all, the kid had been breaking the law. It was too bad, of course, that he had been the son of a fellow officer. Apparently Sergeant Norton hadn't brought his son up with a proper respect for the law.

Still Bucknell knew that it was incumbent on him to offer his regrets to Norton. His fellow officers were giving him strange looks, muttering behind his back, and even George hardly spoke to him.

He sought out Sergeant Norton. "I'm damned sorry about your boy, Sergeant. I wouldn't have had it happen for the world."

Bucknell knew the man only slightly, but it was obvious that he had aged since the accident. His heavy face was gray, his brown eyes dull. "Wouldn't you, Bucknell?" he said in a flat voice. "Danny was my only child. He'd only had that machine six months, and he'd never received a ticket, not even a warning."

"But he was speeding! He must have been doing at least seventy. You know how it is; you've been a motorcycle officer."

"Yes, I know how it is. I know that you have an edge out there.

You have fear on your side. Danny probably lost his head and panicked."

"But he was breaking the law, dammit! And I didn't know he was your son. What would you have me do, let him get away?"

"Would it have made any difference if you'd known he was my boy?"

Bucknell was confused. "What kind of a question is that?"

"You figure it out, Bucknell." Sergeant Norton wheeled and walked away without another word.

Not only baffled but angry now, he took a step after the Sergeant. What the hell, the man was blaming *him*, when it was all the kid's fault!

But he didn't follow it up. It wasn't that he was afraid; he was afraid of no man. Yet Norton was his superior in rank, and it went against the grain for him to buck a superior. Bucknell dismissed the man's attitude as stemming from grief. He would come around to seeing it the right way in time.

DURING THE NEXT TWO WEEKS, SOME OF THE HOSTILITY of his fellow officers died down. At least they weren't so obvious about it. And Bucknell went about doing his job.

There was only one difference that he noted. In those two weeks, very few bike riders used the stretch of deserted road to gun their choppers. Evidently the news of the Norton kid's death had spooked them. But they'd be back. Bucknell was confident of that. So he spent a half hour or so every night in the shadows of the gas station.

And sure enough, one night he heard the familiar V-room, V-room!

Grinning, Bucknell got ready.

This one was another Chopper. It sailed through the intersection doing at least forty. Bucknell eased out into the street behind him. There had been no rain tonight, it was clear, with a full moon.

He hung back, waiting until they were clear of the last few buildings and onto the narrow road, where Bucknell knew the biker would tromp on it.

And that was what happened. Bucknell stepped up his own pace, ready to hit the siren and give the other rider a start of fright.

He hesitated. Something wasn't right. For a moment he puzzled on it. Then he recognized what was bothering him. A sound, a roaring sound behind him.

He glanced around, and they were already there, the leaders moving up alongside of him. He counted eight, all choppers. All the riders wore leather jackets and gloves. All eight had on the pulldown hel-

mets, the visors tinted, and he couldn't see their faces. Yet he had the feeling they were all grinning at him.

The two front riders were even with him now, one on each side, so close he could have reached out and touched them. He risked another glance back and saw that he was boxed in, two of the choppers directly behind him, handlebar to handlebar. He looked ahead to see that the one he'd been chasing had dropped back until he was only a few yards in front.

The first tremor of apprehension touched him. They had set him up!

WHAT WERE THEIR INTENTIONS? To simply give him a scare? Well, they would find that Harve Bucknell didn't scare so easily!

Swiftly, he calculated his chances. His first thought was to use his gun. But he couldn't get all nine. And they were so close that if he shot one, the driver could lose control and ram into him.

They were passing under the bridge now. Bucknell tried to remember what lay ahead, but he wasn't that familiar with the rest of the road.

One thing struck him as strange. They were all silent. Normally they would be shouting insults at him, making obscene gestures. Motorcycle officers were sometimes harassed and taunted by a bunch of outlaw motorcyclists, but to Bucknell's knowledge they never did much more than that. The silence of this bunch was spooky.

Suddenly he saw the bike in front swing to the left, leaving the way ahead free. Now was his chance. They would never catch him once he opened it up flat out. He began to increase his speed gradually. The cycles on either side matched his speed, in tight formation. He would have to do it in a burst of speed.

And it was time to radio for reinforcements. Once alerted, headquarters could send squad cars to block off each end of the road, and they'd have the whole bunch.

One hand holding the handlebars steady, Bucknell reached for the microphone. At the same time he accelerated. He was accustomed to using the radio while traveling at high speed. But it did distract his attention momentarily.

Then his headlight picked out blackness ahead — nothingness! The road bent sharp left. He hit the brake hard, dropping the mike to seize the handlebars with both hands, trying to swing the bike around the curve.

He never made it. The motorcycle left the road, soaring free of the earth for a moment or two, motor snarling. Then it nosed down, dropping like a stone toward the river far below.

THE OTHER CYCLISTS, PREPARED FOR THE SHARP CURVE, made it around all right, then U-turned and came back to where Bucknell had gone over. They dismounted. The last chopper to return was the one that had lured Bucknell from the shadows of the station.

Getting off, the rider removed his visored helmet. "It's been a hell of a long time since I've straddled a motorcycle," Sergeant Norton said. "And these choppers . . . For a moment there I thought I might go over with him."

He walked to the edge of the cliff. They all clustered around, staring down. There was enough moonlight to show the smashed motorcycle on the rocks below, and the mangled figure beneath it.

The man beside Sergeant Norton also removed his helmet. "That even matters, huh, Sergeant?" George Melton said.

"That even matters, yes," Sergeant Norton said with a sigh. His heavy face was sad.

"It's just like we discussed, Sergeant," George said in understanding. "Harve was becoming a rogue cop. He would have killed others."

"I know. Still . . . " Sergeant Norton straightened up, looking around at the others. He said crisply, "All right, men. Let's get these choppers back to the rental place before it closes."



BOO!



Don't be frightened — at least not yet. But BOO! is what we're going to say to you in the gala Halloween issue of MSMM, with weird, frightening, chilling stories by Brett Halliday, Talmadge Powell, Bill Pronzini and Jeffrey Wallmann, and others. The October MSMM is one you won't want to miss. Make sure your electric bill is paid. You wouldn't want the lights to go out while you're reading it!

The first few months were honeymoon heaven. Then, things began to go downhill!

Going to Pot

by PATTY MATTHEWS

ROSALINDA JOHNSON AND MALCOLM ASCHE EACH WANTED something different from life: Malcolm wanted Rosalinda, and Rosalinda wanted the perfect stoneware glaze.

Rosalinda was very frank about her feelings. Although she considered herself a free soul and not tied to conventional standards she believed very firmly in being honest.

"I'm a confirmed potter, Malcolm," she told him. "I'm not certain that you fully realize what that means."

He smiled. He was a handsome man, and his smile was one of his best features. "I know it's important to you."

She sighed and shook her head. "No. You don't *really* understand. It's much more than that, Malcolm. Potters are . . . Well, some people might say that they are a little obsessed. Potting is a way of *life*. If you want a conventional wife, one who'll keep the house neat, iron your

shirts, and have meals ready on time, well, I'm just not the one. I don't live that way. I can't live that way. My work takes a lot of my time."

His face expressed his hurt. "But you love me. At least you say you do."

She sighed again and took his face between her hands. "I do love you, Malcolm. But that has nothing to do with it. I can't change my whole life just because I love you."

Malcolm was quiet for a moment. Being a normal male, he believed that if she loved him, she *should* change her whole life for him. In the back of his mind was the thought that once they were married, she would come around. But because he wanted her — she was a beautiful girl, and excitingly different from any other he had known — he dissembled.

"We can work things out," he told her earnestly. "I won't ask you to give up your way of life. Just let me share it."

This last he thought particularly effective. As she looked up, he sensed her indecision and kissed her.

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL WEDDING. The bride and groom received an electric coffee pot; electric blanket, electric bun-warmer; electric mixer; and two toasters from *his* friends. They received a set of hand-crafted bowls; two hanging planters; a macrame hammock; a stone-ware bean pot; and a stoneware frog from *her* friends.

These items, along with their individual effects, they moved into a large, rambling house in the suburbs. Malcolm had really wanted to move into a modern condominium in the center of town, but since there was no room for a kiln or potting equipment, this was, of course, out of the question.

The house stood on an acre lot full of fruit trees and berry vines. They had plenty of privacy, yet it was only a few minutes from the freeway, and Malcolm could make it to his office in town in roughly twenty minutes.

Moreover, the house was a good buy. It was in excellent condition, and, as Rosalinda pointed out, they had a lot more room than they would have had in the condominium. So Malcolm accepted the house with good enough grace, and only periodically regretted the loss of the sauna bath, olympic-sized pool, and billiard room that would have gone with the condo.

He did grumble a bit at having to park his Mercedes in the yard because Rosalinda had appropriated the garage for a work shop, but she reminded him of their pre-nuptial agreement. She had promised to try to carry on a more or less conventional family life. She would

try to have dinner ready for him when he came home; keep the house in at least reasonable order; and see that he had clean shirts. He agreed not to interfere with her potting; or complain about the time she spent in this activity; and to allow her the space necessary to perform her work.

FOR THE FIRST FEW HONEYMOON MONTHS, things went along swimmingly. Malcolm was happy and busy with his job — he had been promoted to Third Assistant Vice President — and Rosalinda got her work space organized, a large stoneware kiln built, and she felt that she was really coming close to perfecting a really exceptional ash glaze for the vase she intended to enter in the annual *Potters Exhibit and Competition*, held in December.

One weekend, in an excess of zeal, Malcolm even made an attempt to understand just what Rosalinda saw in this potting business.

Rosalinda had misgivings, but in the face of sincere interest, she could only do what she could to instruct him, and perhaps infuse him with some of her own enthusiasm.

She showed him how she threw the pots. He was quite impressed, as he watched the round, breast-shaped mound of clay on the wheel grow beneath her fingers into a lovely, smooth-curving bowl.

She explained how the greenware was dried, then fired, then glazed, then fired again. He followed the procedure with what appeared to be real interest.

The glazes, in particular, fascinated him. It was difficult for him to believe that the muddy looking concoctions were the genesis of the beautiful glowing glazes that adorned the finished ware.

He looked around the studio. "Where's that special glaze; the one you're always working on?"

She pointed to a small plastic bucket filled with a brownish, rough-textured semi-fluid. He looked at it seriously, then looked at Rosalinda. "It looks like mud," he said.

She picked up a charming, small jar with a soft brownish-green finish, and held it up to him. "That's what people always say when they first see unfired glazes. But see, it comes out of the firing like this.

"This is an ash glaze. The basic ingredients are ashes and clay. It has to be fired at high heat, about 2300 degrees fahrenheit."

Malcolm whistled. "*That* is hot!"

She smiled. "Yes it is."

"Is that all that goes into the glazes, ashes and clay?"

She shook her head. "Heavens no. First of all, you can use many

different kinds of ash; pine needle, advocado leaves, bone ash. Each one gives a different color, or shade. Different potters use different combinations, and most potters are very secretive about the formulas they develop."

He leaned forward, and kissed her on the nose. "Well, I'm certain that you'll finally get your glaze the way you want it. I know you can do anything you want to do."

Rosalinda stood on tiptoe and kissed him back. It was really very sweet of him to say that.

IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, HOWEVER, DESPITE MALCOLM'S attempts to understand Rosalinda's work, and despite her efforts to conform to his idea of a conventional housewife, things began to go downhill.

Malcolm had never really cared for Rosalinda's friends, and now that he was settling into his role as Third Assistant Vice President, he found them more unpalatable than ever. His main objection was that they were always *around*. Almost every night, when he came home, one or more longhaired young men or earnest young women were with Rosalinda in the studio.

There was one young man he disliked particularly. Greg — a tall, dark-haired youth who affected an Indian headband. Malcolm thought that the young man seemed entirely too sure of himself, and he exhibited a casual familiarity toward Rosalinda that Malcolm found himself resenting.

Also, there was the matter of Rosalinda's appearance. When they had first met, he had found her eccentricities of dress rather charming. Now, seeing her next to the lacquered perfection of his associates' wives, he saw her in a different light.

She was, to put it frankly, sloppy. She dressed like a hippie, or a college student. Their first real quarrel was occasioned by her choice of outfit to wear to a party given by the First Vice President and his wife.

Their second real argument — a real screamer — came about when Rosalinda informed Malcolm that she was going to give lessons in pot throwing.

"No!" he declared emphatically. "Positively not!"

Rosalinda's eyes narrowed. "And just why not, may I ask?"

Malcolm waved his arms in frustration. "Because there are entirely too many people around here now. Your friends are always underfoot. My Lord, if you have students here too, the place will be like a zoo."

Rosalinda crossed her arms — a bad sign — and began tapping her foot. "Are you intimating that my friends are animals? Because if you are, I can say a few things about those phony friends of yours."

And so it went; from bad to worse. The pre-nuptial agreement was soon forgotten. Malcolm continually carped on the state of the house, and complained about Rosalinda's friends and students. Rosalinda let the housework go, and spent almost all of her time in the studio.

BY THE END OF THE YEAR, THEY WERE BARELY SPEAKING. Rosalinda was preoccupied in last minute changes in the formula for her ash glaze, and Malcolm had just begun an affair with the youngest girl in his steno pool.

The whole situation came to a crux on a Friday night near the end of November. Malcolm, who had just had a fight with the girl from the steno pool, arrived home early to find Rosalinda and the head-banded young potter in the bedroom.

Actually, it was a harmless enough situation. Rosalinda had asked Greg in to see a painting she had recently purchased. The picture happened to be hanging on the wall of the bedroom. That was really all there was to it.

However, it looked quite different to Malcolm. "What is going on here," he bellowed, the perfect prototype of the outraged husband.

Rosalinda and Greg jumped and looked at each other guiltily.

"I was showing him a *picture*, Malcolm. What do you *think* was going on?" There was contempt in her voice; she knew about the girl in the steno pool.

Malcolm glared at Greg. "I think it's pretty obvious."

"Only if you have a filthy mind," said Rosalinda.

"I think I'd better leave," said Greg, and quickly put these words into action.

"So," sneered Malcolm, "*this* is what you teach your students."

"Malcolm, you are a narrow minded, dirty minded hypocrite."

Malcolm, in a flurry of guilt and anger, gave Rosalinda a sound blow to the side of her head. Rosalinda, naturally enough, defended herself. Since Malcolm was a foot taller and at least fifty pounds heavier, she understandably sought a little edge. She picked up the ornamental anniversary clock from the dresser, and threw it.

Being an artist, Rosalinda had a good eye. The clock struck Malcolm's temple, and he crashed like a felled tree. As he fell, he struck his head on the edge of the heavy, oak dresser.

Rosalinda, her heart thudding, bent over him and felt for a pulse.

There was none.

For several minutes Rosalinda stayed crouched over him, thinking terrible, frightening thoughts. Her husband was dead. She had killed him; accidentally, of course, but he was dead, nonetheless.

She would have to call the police. They would come in their bold black and white cars, and they would ask questions. But would they believe the answers? Would she have to stand trial? Would they put her in jail?

She stood up slowly; her legs felt stiff and cold. She felt heavy with despair. Now she would not be able to enter the competition she had prepared for so carefully. Now she would not be able to perfect her glaze — and it was no near to completion. Unless —

She had left the backyard light on, and the glow illuminated the kiln, standing almost directly outside the bedroom window. She stood staring at it for a long time . . .

THE ROOM WAS CROWDED. A surprising number of people had turned out to see the exhibit, and Rosalinda, flushed and happy, was accepting congratulations on winning the blue ribbon and the money prize for her large vase with the unusual brownish green glaze.

Next to her stood a slim, bespectacled man with a note pad in his hand. He put his hand on her arm, to get her attention.

“Mrs. Asch, I’m Mr. Loper. Would you mind answering a few questions for our readers?”

She turned to him and smiled. “Certainly.”

“Could you tell our readers how you got that exceptionally fine glaze? I’ve never seen a finish quite like it.”

She smiled slightly, and wagged her finger at him. “Now, Mr. Loper, you must know that potters don’t give out the secret of their special glazes.”

He blushed. “Sorry, but isn’t there anything you *can* tell me about it?”

“Well,” she said. “I can tell you that it’s an ash glaze.”

Mr. Loper wrote busily in his notebook. “Now, Mrs. Asch, does your husband support you in your work; does he help you in any way?”

Rosalinda’s eyes focused on something far away. “Yes, my husband has been a great help to me. He’s adventuring now in South America, you know. But I can truly say that I would never have perfected this glaze without Malcolm. He put everything he had into it.”

Mr. Loper sighed admiringly. “That will be a real inspiration to our married readers,” he said.

Rosalinda smiled enigmatically.



I watched the man intently, wondering what he wanted. He didn't ring the bell but went to one of the windows facing the terrace. I thought to myself with a shock: the man is a burglar!

Uncle Max was Bleeding

by ARTHUR MOORE

I HAD JUST COME DOWNSTAIRS WITH MY BAG, prepared to go out of the house when I saw him. The front door was bracketed by glass panels, narrow diamond shaped panes, and through one of them I spotted him coming up the walk. He was a man of medium height wearing dark clothes and no hat. I thought he had a furtive air and I paused, frowning. He came up to the door, looking to right and left. None of the lights were on upstairs, and since I intended to go out immediately, no light was burning downstairs either.

Drawing back, I watched the man intently, never having seen him before, wondering what he wanted. He didn't ring the bell but went to one of the four windows facing the terrace and I heard him try it. I thought to myself with a shock — *the man is a burglar!*

To say the least, I was extremely surprised and apprehensive. I am not young and I had no weapon, only the bag I carried. For a moment I felt a tremor of panic.

He tried another of the windows and I heard it slide up. That startled me and I ducked down, hardly knowing what to do! One reads and hears so much it's hard to know what to do when faced by reality.

I stood perfectly still by the draperies near the door, and the stranger

came into the room. I feared he would turn on a light or would hear my breathing — maybe even the hammering of my heart. But he crossed the room, pushing a chair aside, and I thought he went into the dining room. Cars were passing on the street, occasionally a motorcycle clattered by, and in the periods of silence I tried to follow his movements but could not.

Afraid to move, I knew myself to be in a particularly poor position by the door for if I attempted to unlock it he would surely hear me. Metallic sounds carry far. I wondered if I might slip across to the window where he'd entered, and I took a few halting steps. The intruder might well become desperate if I confronted him suddenly, but I had to do something.

Listening, biting my lip, I debated with myself. Cars droned by on the street and I yearned to be in one of them. I heard a siren a long way off, but the sound did not come any closer. I told myself my best bet was to go out the back.

Gritting my teeth, I moved as silently as I could, placing my feet carefully and feeling for furniture I could not see. It was nerve-wracking, moving across the dark room toward the back of the house. It seemed to take forever to creep to the back, but when I reached the kitchen I began to feel safe. There was a faint and luminous glow from the windows of the house next door, enough to allow me to see. When I silently closed the kitchen door behind me, I took a deep breath of relief.

In another moment I unlocked the rear outside door and slipped through.

At that instant the powerful beams of several flashlights pinned me against the wall of the house. I was startled and astonished, and instinctively began to run.

I heard the rapid shots. Something struck me in the chest and almost instantly I fell and blackness enveloped me.

WHEN I CAME TO, I WAS ON MY BACK and an ambulance with a revolving red light loomed over me. People were chattering excitedly. I heard a young man's voice saying: "I had forgotten my key so I went in a window and upstairs. That's when I found Uncle Max — and he was still bleeding!"

I opened my eyes as the voice came closer. It was the man I had seen on the porch by the door. He spoke to me. "You didn't have to kill him!"

I closed my eyes again. I hadn't intended to. I only came for the silver.

It distressed Leon to think of the innocent women who had died, yet he could not suppress a tiny thrill each time the Strangler escaped. It meant there was still a chance that one night he might choose the right house — kill the right woman!

Dear Strangler

by GARY BRANDNER

STRANGLER CLAIMS SIXTH VICTIM

The headline was as much as Leon Gorms could read squinting across the breakfast table. The rest of the story was covered by the meaty fist of his wife. Billie Gorms always gripped the newspaper in the morning as though daring Leon to reach across the table and snatch it away. It was a dare Leon was not likely to take.

Two slices jumped out of the toaster at Leon's elbow. He buttered one for Billie and one for himself. His wife took her slice without looking at him and crammed half of it into her mouth. Leon watched the reddish mole at the edge of her left nostril. Her vigorous chewing made the thing squirm on her face as though it were alive. To Leon the ugly, bean-sized growth had come to symbolize everything he detested about his wife. He imagined himself taking a heavy caliber pistol from his belt and shooting the damn thing off her face.

“What are you staring at?”

Leon started guiltily. "Just glancing at the story about the Strangler. It seems he killed another woman last night."

Billie snorted, making the mole jump. "She most likely had it coming. Whores, the lot of them, if you ask me."

"According to the news stories most of them were respectable housewives."

"Yes, and you believe that, I suppose. Well, let me tell you something, decent women don't get themselves killed like that." Billie flapped the newspaper out and tried to turn the page. When the paper would not lie flat the way she wanted, she slammed her hand into the center crease, ripping the page raggedly in half.

"Why don't they fold these things the way they're supposed to?" she demanded, glaring across the table at Leon.

He was not sure whether an answer was required of him, so he merely shrugged and put on a noncommittal smile.

"Tschah!" Billie's heavy shoulders jerked impatiently. She tossed the torn newspaper aside. "I suppose you'll be working late tonight?"

"No, I'll be home early," he said. There would be no point in staying away; the Strangler had never struck on successive nights.

"Well, then I have a list of things you can pick up for me at the store."

Billie got up and went out of the room. Leon carried the breakfast dishes out to the kitchen and rinsed them in the sink. He went back into the living room and got his coat from the closet. He made sure Billie was still busy elsewhere, and walked over to the portion of the living room that was set aside as "his corner." It contained a small desk where he kept his stamp collection, a few books about stamps and wildlife, and a hanging bird cage. Inside the cage a blue-green parakeet perched unsteadily on a plastic ring suspended from the top of the cage. The bird cocked his head and watched Leon with bright little eyes.

"How's it going, Petey?" Leon said softly.

The bird hopped from the ring to one of the wire crossbars of the cage. Leon poked a forefinger through the wire. The bird pecked at it gently.

"I'll bet you'd like a nice wooden perch instead of that slippery ring, wouldn't you. You be a good bird and maybe you'll have one tomorrow."

"Are you talking to that stupid bird again?"

Leon had not heard Billie come back into the room. He turned from the cage, embarrassed.

"How come it never talks back?" Billie said. "I thought those kind

of birds were supposed to talk."

"He doesn't talk because I don't want him to," Leon said quietly.

"Yeah, I'll bet."

Leon started for the door. "I'd better get going."

Billie thrust a shopping list into his hand. "Here's the stuff I want you to get." She turned without further conversation and clumped off toward the bedroom.

Briefly Leon stood looking after his wife. A big, thick-bodied woman, shapeless under the tent-like muumuu, short drab hair matted at the back of her neck. He turned away so she would not look back and catch his expression.

WHILE HE DROVE THE FIVE MILES TO HIS OFFICE, Leon thought about the Strangler. Over the past four months six women had died, yet the police knew very little about the killer. They had a vague description from a witness who said she saw a big man, dressed in black and with something worn over his face, running from the scene of one of the murders. His method was to enter a house through an unlocked window and strangle the woman therein with an electric cord ripped from one of her own appliances. Though the women were reasonably attractive, there was no evidence of rape.

It was highly unlikely, Leon knew, that the Strangler would ever choose *his* house, but he clung to the possibility. A man needed some small crumb of hope to keep going. And it was not as though he left things entirely to chance. As often as he could manage, Leon stayed late at the office, working past midnight, which was the time the Strangler usually made his kill. Indeed, on more than one of the nights Leon had stayed away from home the killer had actually struck. But alas, Billie had always been home waiting for him, irritatingly alive.

As he waited for a traffic light to change, Leon composed a letter in his head:

Dear Strangler:

Although she is not exactly your type, I would like to recommend Mrs. Billie Gorms as your next victim. The street is dark and quiet, and you will have no trouble getting into the house. As an added inducement, you will find a fairly valuable stamp collection in —

The light changed to green and he drove on.

He arrived at the office a few minutes early, and was settling down

at his desk when his assistant Jack Wilkerson arrived. Jack was a tall, pleasant young man with bushy red hair and a boyish smile. He was unmarried, more power to him, and a good worker, if a little slow to learn.

"Hear about the Strangler getting another one last night?" Jack said.

"I saw the headline."

"Just a couple of blocks from your place."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Your wife getting nervous?"

"Not *my* wife. Nothing frightens her."

Jack hung up his coat and sat down at the desk facing Leon's. The same desk where Amy had sat for six beautiful months. Young, slim, vibrant . . . Amy had hair of richest brown and a low, caressing voice. She also had a bright, inquiring mind, and could quickly master any job Leon assigned her. In the time they worked together a sweet intimacy had grown between Leon and Amy. They had never kissed, barely touched except by accident, as when they passed each other in the office. Yet, in a sense they were lovers.

Then came the awful day when Billie had burst unexpectedly into the office. Her eyes under the dark brows had flashed dangerously, the mole glowing an angry red. She hysterically accused Leon of gross infidelity and *déception*, then turned on Amy. Billie had shouted foul gutter epithets at the girl and raged so furiously that Leon had feared a physical attack.

Amy had run out of the office crying, and had never come back. Leon had protested their innocence, of course, but in the face of Billie's righteous anger his protests had withered and died.

After that there were no more girl assistants. Billie had robbed him of that small pleasure the way she had stripped him of everything that had been his alone. All he had left were his stamps, his bird, and his fantasies.

At lunchtime Leon bought a newspaper and took it into the cafeteria with him to read in detail about the latest Strangler killing. Once again there were no witnesses, no clues. The Strangler was either very smart or very lucky.

Naturally, it distressed Leon to think of the innocent women who had died at his hands, yet he could not suppress a tiny thrill each time the Strangler escaped. It meant there was still a chance that one night he might choose the right house . . . kill the right woman.

After lunch Leon stopped at a pet store and bought a hardwood perch for Petey. Seven inches long, a half-inch in diameter, it would

provide a nice firm footing for the little bird. Leon was smiling as he walked back to his office.

THAT EVENING HE RETURNED HOME WITH A GROCERY BAG in each arm filled with the things Billie had asked him to buy. Billie was watching a game show on television. She did not look up.

Leon carried the bags into the kitchen and dropped them on the counter. He reached into the pocket of his overcoat for the new wooden perch and walked into the living room smiling. When he reached the cage, his smile fell away.

"Where's Petey?" he said.

Billie kept her eyes on the television screen. "You mean the bird? It got out."

"Got out? What do you mean got out?"

"What do you think I mean? I was cleaning the cage and it flew out. The front door was open."

"You never clean the cage," Leon said. "I've always done that."

"Well today I did it." She turned for the first time and looked at him, her heavy brows drawn together in a scowl. "What are you, accusing me or something?"

Leon concentrated on the mole, bunched like a little red fish at the edge of her nose. He said, "I just wondered how he could have got out."

"Good riddance, if you ask me," Billie said. "The last thing any sane person needs in their house is a bird."

There was nothing more to be said, but throughout the evening Leon keenly felt the absence of the bright-eyed little parakeet.

Before bedtime he carried the trash out to the can behind the house. He raised the lid of the can and started to drop the bag inside, then hesitated. In the bottom of the can was the crumpled front page of today's newspaper. *Strangler Claims . . .* Leon reached down and poked at the wad of paper. It opened out just enough for him to see a patch of blue-green feathers. He closed his eyes, and for a moment swayed on his feet. Red spots flared on the inside of his eyelids. Then he opened his eyes, dropped the bag of trash down on top of the crumpled newspaper, and went back into the house.

That night he lay awake for a long time, staring across at the other bed where Billie snored softly. He knew then that he could not wait for the Strangler.

IN THE MORNING LEON ATE HIS TOAST and drank his coffee as usual and stared hard at the mole beside his wife's nose. How good, he

thought, it would be never to look across the table at that again.

"Will you be working late tonight?" she said.

"Yes, I'm afraid I will."

In a little while Billie heaved herself up from the table and clumped out to the bathroom. As soon as she was gone Leon hurried to his corner of the living room. Trying not to look at the empty bird cage, he checked the lock on the window. It was unfastened, as he had left it. Not that he *had* to come in the window tonight, but it would be better if everything were done the way the Strangler would do it. He leaned down to tug on the electric cord where it entered the base of a standing lamp. He jerked the cord several times until something broke loose under the lamp and the cord could be easily pulled free.

Leon hurried and left the house while Billie was still in the bathroom. He did not want to have to speak to her again. Not ever.

At the office he waited until Jack Wilkerson was settled across from him, then rifled through a stack of papers. "We've got a lot of work here that has to be done before the weekend."

Jack looked up quickly. "Does that mean we'll have to stay late?"

"I will, I'm afraid, but I don't think I'll need you, Jack."

"I'd be glad to help," Jack said without conviction.

Leon shook his head. "Thanks, but it's the kind of a job one man can do just as fast as two." He bent his head and pretended to study the papers before him while he thought about what he was going to do tonight.

It would not be easy to strangle a big woman like Billie. However, he would have the advantage of surprise. If she was asleep when he got there, it would be no problem. He would kill her before she ever woke up. And even if she was awake she would never suspect what her quiet little husband had in mind until the cord was around her throat. Leon had enough strength in his arms, he was sure, to apply the pressure needed during the crucial seconds until she blacked out. Once she was unconscious, he could take his time killing her.

The police would be around asking questions, of course. When a wife was murdered they always suspected the husband, and vice versa. Still, it was up to them to prove he was guilty, and unless he made a mistake, that would not be easy.

And what if the worst happened? What if he were arrested, convicted, sentenced? Would a few years in prison be any worse than spending the rest of his life with Billie?

THE DAY PASSED QUICKLY. LEON SAID GOODNIGHT to Jack at the regular quitting time and went ahead with the work on his desk.

Just in case anybody asked, he would be able to show that he had really been working tonight.

He left the office at eleven-thirty. Driving toward his home through the deserted streets, Leon mentally gave Billie one last chance. If he could rekindle even a spark of tenderness for the woman, he would grant her a reprieve. He thought back to the big, determined girl he had met at the house of friends. At the time Leon had no intention of marrying anybody, but Billie had been so forceful in steering him toward the altar that it had just seemed like too much trouble to resist. The early years had been bad enough as he watched his possessions disposed of one by one, his comfortable way of life twisted out of shape. And now even his little bird was gone. No, there would be no reprieve.

Leon parked three blocks from his house, leaving the car on a quiet side street. He pulled on a pair of leather gloves, turned the collar of his coat up, and started to walk.

Along the way he kept to the shadows cast by the pale street lights. He met no one. Since the coming of the Strangler, few people ventured out at night. He kept watching for police patrol cars cruising the area, but none passed during his short walk.

The window, screened from the neighboring house by a row of cypress trees, slid up smoothly and without a sound. Leon levered himself up onto the sill and stepped through into his corner of the living room. For several seconds he stood holding his breath, listening. He heard nothing but the usual night sounds. In the faint glow of a street light outside, he knelt and pulled the plug of the lamp cord from the wall socket. With a gentle tug he freed the other end where he had loosened it at the base of the lamp. He gripped the cord in his fists and snapped it taut several times. It had a tough and deadly feel.

Outside his bedroom door Leon paused and pulled in a deep breath. He knew he must do it now, or it would never be done. He willed himself to open the door, slip into the room, and kill her. He could not move. His shoulders sagged, his hands dropped to his sides, one still limply holding the lamp cord. In this, the most momentous decision of his life, he had failed again. He started to cry.

Without warning the bedroom door was snatched open in front of him. Leon stood frozen as a huge black shape stepped through the doorway and loomed over him, the face flattened and distorted by a stocking mask.

It took a moment for Leon's mind to comprehend what was happening. The black-clad figure came at him.

"No!" he cried. "It's all right! You don't understand!"

He felt the electrical cord jerked from his grasp and whipped around his throat before he could react. Instantly his air was cut off. The blood pounded in his ears. He thrashed futilely at the powerful assailant, his coat flapping, impeding his movements. His flailing right hand caught on something hard in the pocket of his coat . . . the wooden perch for his little bird. Not much of a weapon, it was all he had. With the last of his strength Leon grasped the wooden rod and struck at the broad masked face above him. The perch struck the attacker's collar bone and cracked lengthwise. The splintered end drove on into the fleshy throat and punctured the carotid artery. Blood pumped out over Leon's hand and ran up his sleeve.

The choking noose of the lamp cord slackened as the Strangler coughed blood and fell heavily to the floor. Barely conscious himself, Leon fell on top of the body.

IT WAS A FULL MINUTE BEFORE LEON RECOVERED his strength enough to rise. As he pushed up off the motionless bulk of the killer, he stopped and peered closely at the face. Beside the nose, mashed down now by the stocking mask, was an angry red mole.

For the first time in a long, long while, Leon Gorms laughed aloud. ☺

MYSTERY MAKERS Continued from page 5

JACK MATCHA (*The Brass Ring*)

is an award-winning playwright whose plays have been produced on London and Los Angeles stages before enthusiastic audiences. He has also written suspense novels and many short stories and articles for national magazines. He is currently Professor of Journalism at a California college.

CARL PANZRAN (*Counselor at Law*)

is the pen name of a top-ranking officer in the Mystery Writers of America. This story was turned down by one of the other magazines as "not in the public interest."

I intended to even the score, but I couldn't do it myself. Not directly, anyway!

The Enemy of my Enemy is my Friend

by DAN J. MARLOWE

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND YOU, LINDELL." The warden was frowning as I stood in front of his desk. "If you were twins, you could never win a fight from Colaneri. And I'm sure you're aware that you're losing a day of good time for every day you spend in solitary after one of these idiotic fights."

Good time is the number of days chopped off the back end of a sentence if the prison administration feels you've been no problem to them. It can amount to as much as a third of the original sentence handed down by the court.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Then why do you keep it up?" he demanded.

"Look, sir, somewhere out in the world there's a man I hope you never meet. You will dislike each other intensely at sight, without reason. Any friction will produce aggravated irritation and an increasingly blind, overpowering hatred that nothing short of bloodshed, even if it's your own, will satisfy. There's no sense to it, but that's the way it is with Colaneri and me."

He was staring at me. "So what are you going to do about it?"

"I intend to stay as far away from him as I can."

But not until I even the score, I neglected to say.

"I'll help," the warden said briskly. "I've transferred you to Cell

Block C. Your yard time will be staggered, too."

"Yes, sir."

"That's all, Lindell."

A MOUNTAIN OF A MAN WAS STRETCHED ON HIS BACK on one of the cots in the cell to which I was brought. "Hiya, stupid," he said when he saw me. "Welcome back to the Revoltin' Hilton."

The warden had done me no favor in selecting my new cellmate. It was Big Henry Gerard, safecracker-weightlifter deluxe, and a real musclehead. Unlike most of the prison population, he looked with scorn upon forgers and con men like me. I wasn't at all sure that I had bettered myself by the transfer.

I went into the cell and sat down on the other cot. Big Henry turned onto his side to get a better look at me. "Your nose has shifted home base," he informed me unnecessarily. "An' I hear a few of your teeth did, too, plus a couple of ribs." I didn't say anything. "Stupid," he repeated. "You couldn't lick one side of that meatball on your best day an' his worst, but still you got to try it three times. I'll tell you, though, I envied you."

I wondered if he had envied my five days in the prison hospital before I took up my most recent residence in solitary.

"Know why?" he went on. "Because you have a chance to go one-on-one with that foul ball. I wish it had been me in there with him. Never happen, though. He only takes on sure things like you. His goons knew he could put you away."

I remembered only too well the semi-circle of gloating faces while Colaneri pounded me into the prison yard. "If you two ever matched up, they could sell tickets," I said.

"In the prison system, anyway," Big Henry said with a grin. "But his goons'd never let me near him. How'd you get crossways with him in the first place?"

"It was a chess game. You know how he challenges everyone out in the yard? I'd watched him, and I knew he couldn't play. He'd just memorized a few openings. If a match ever went beyond the middle game, he'd be finished. He snows people. I sat down and counter-played his opening, and he knew he was in trouble. He tipped over the board, then accused me of doing it. He refused to play me again, and he never stopped harassing me after that."

"You're sure he can't play?" Big Henry sounded doubtful. "Everyone in here thinks he's top dog."

"Intimidation," I said. "He can't play. I could —" it came to me in a single blinding flash " — I could teach you enough in a month to

beat him." He stared at me. "I mean it. Want to try it? Two hours a night here in the cell for a month and you could show up that loud-mouth."

"You got it, man," he said eagerly.

BIG HENRY GERARD WORKED FAITHFULLY WITH ME for the next two weeks. He learned the moves I taught him without too much difficulty. Then he wanted to challenge someone in the prison yard to see how he was getting on.

"No, no," I told him. "If Colaneri sees you, or hears that you're playing, he won't take a chance with you. Make him challenge you. When you're ready, tell him you know he's no good and anyone can beat him, even you. You've got to go up against him without ever having been seen playing a game on the inside."

"Yeah, it'd take somethin' like that," he agreed. "Okay." And he continued to practice with me night after night in our cell.

He could hardly hold himself down when I told him he was ready. He rushed up to where Colaneri was playing during the next exercise period and made himself obnoxious. He reported gleefully to me afterward that Colaneri had challenged him. The match was set for the next day.

"You know the rules of the game now," I pumped him up, "and the big thing is not to let him pull a fast one on you. I'm sure he'll try to confuse you, but you're not going to let a tinhorn like that tell you he knows more than you do."

"You can win a few bets on that," Big Henry said grimly.

I SLIPPED DOWN TO THE WEIGHT ROOM THAT NIGHT and told Big Henry's weightlifting friends about his upcoming match the next day. They were surprised to hear about his newly acquired prowess, but they said they'd be there to see the unloved Colaneri humbled.

I slept very well that night.

I wanted the weightlifters there to keep Colaneri's goons away from Big Henry when the action started.

Then it would be Big Henry vs. Colaneri, one-on-one.

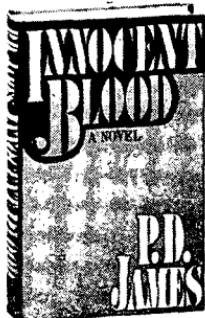
Colaneri would be in as bad shape as I had been against him.

There is no one more positive than Big Henry when he thinks he is right.

No one more impulsive.

It had been quite an intellectual exercise for me during the past 30 days, while Big Henry moved the chessmen as I had taught him: rooks like bishops, bishops like knights, knights like rooks.

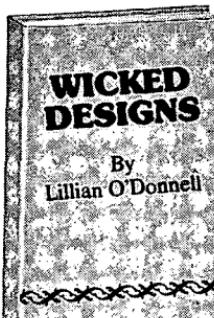
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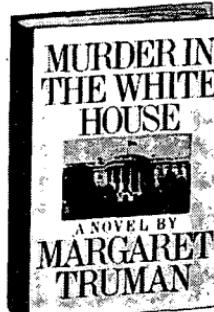
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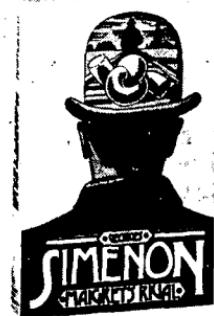
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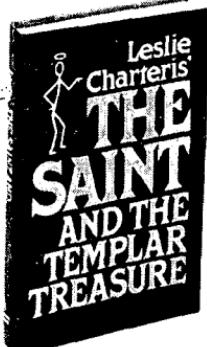
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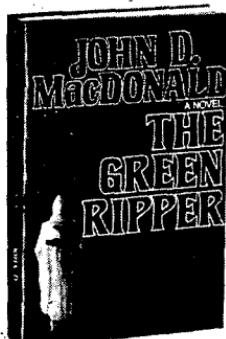
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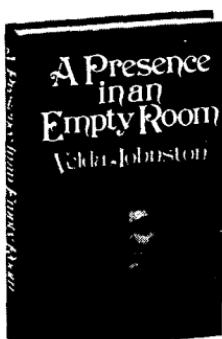
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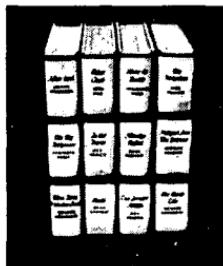
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He'd never really trusted her, and now he knew he'd been too quick to throw away the gun. He looked at the distant stone fortress. That tower on the ocean looked like a great place for an accident!

BLARNEY

by RICHARD LAYMON

“WHAT’S THAT?”

Deke looked to the right, where Val was pointing. Half a mile up the coast, on a rocky point high above the surf, stood the greystone walls of a castle ruin. “A castle, I guess,” he said.

“In California?”

“Probably some nut put it up. Some guy didn’t know what to do with his money.”

She tugged his arm. “Can we go over to it?”

“Leave off my arm.”

She let go. “Can we?”

“We’ll see,” Deke said. He slipped a .32 automatic out of his belt.

“Hey, what’re you doing?”

“Kissing it good-bye.”

“You’re not throwing it away!”

“Oh yes I am.”

“Deke!”

HE GENERALLY DIDN'T DISLIKE VAL. After all, she wasn't bad looking for a gal her age. Her hair was dyed a gaudy reddish-brown. Her face had a few sags, same as her body, but what can you expect? Gals start downhill at eighteen, and Val was pushing fifty. No, he didn't dislike her looks much. Her big trouble was she didn't have much common sense. "I have to throw it away," he told her.

"Maybe we'll need it."

"We'll get a new one. They catch us with this, they can tie it into the shooting of that idiot clerk, and it's death row for both of us."

Val's wide eyes looked shocked. "I didn't shoot him!"

"Doesn't matter, stupid. You were there. You were in on it. That's the same as if you dropped the hammer."

"It is?" She looked desolate, and ten years older.

Deke grinned. "It's okay. Don't let it worry you. I'll just deep-six this baby" With all his strength, he hurled the automatic. It flipped and spun, its blue-steel dark against the overcast sky, dropping like a shot raven. In the tumult of the surf far below, he couldn't see it splash.

"Now we're clean. No hard evidence, no witnesses . . . "

"I'll never speak a word," said Val.

"Oh boy," he muttered. In the two months he'd known her, he never quite trusted her. Now she comes up with a remark like that. If she thought about squealing enough to deny it . . .

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Nothing," Deke said. He'd been too quick to throw away the gun.

He looked again at the distant stone fortress. That tower on the ocean side looked like a great place for an accident. "Still want to visit the castle?" he asked.

Val beamed.

They hurried back to the car.

WALKING THE BARREN LEDGE, DEKE TOOK A LONG LOOK at the castle. It stood on an outcropping of rock, cut off entirely from the bluff. A rickety footbridge, about thirty feet long, reached over to it.

He could heave Val off the bridge, easy enough. But what if it gave out under the weight of two people and he took the dive with her?

The castle itself seemed to be nothing more than four stone walls with the big tower on the southwest corner. Forget the footbridge. The tower was the best place to do it.

"Isn't it lovely!" Val blurted. "It's so . . . I don't know — *majestic!* You'd think it would be in the guide books."

"Maybe it is."

"Oh, it's not. I've read them all. I know California like my own face, and I've never heard of a castle like this. There's the Hearst Castle, of course, but it's so different. I've been there twice, you know. Once with my second husband, and . . . Where's the ticket booth, do you think?"

"I don't think there is one."

"Oh, there *has* to be."

"Maybe inside," Deke said. He was sure there would be no ticket booth. The place looked deserted and forlorn. He didn't feel like explaining, though. Val would see for herself, soon enough.

They reached the footbridge. Far below it, the surf beat and churned.

"So far down!"

"I'll go first," Deke said. "You stay put till I'm across."

Val nodded.

DEKE HURRIED ACROSS THE SWAYING BRIDGE, and sighed with relief when he reached the far end. He was trembling. As he tried to calm down, Val appeared beside him.

"Oh look!" she said, and pointed at a sign above the castle gate. "'Herlihy's Castle,'" she read. "'May age ne'r wither thy brow.'"

"Cute," Deke said.

They stepped beneath the arch of the gateway. Except for a dozen seagulls taking shelter from the wind, the courtyard was deserted. "Guess we don't have to buy tickets, after all."

Val pushed her hands into her coat pockets. "I don't like this place, Deke. It makes me jumpy."

"A minute ago you said it's majestic."

"Yeah, but . . ."

"Yeah but, yeah but," Deke mimicked.

"It shouldn't be here, you know what I mean?"

"No, I don't."

"I mean, a castle in California?"

Ignoring her, he started walking across the courtyard. Seagulls in his way took flight, circled, and landed again.

Val hurried to catch up. She gripped his elbow, but he kept walking. "I've got this crazy weird feeling, Deke. Like we're in a nightmare. We oughtta get out of here. Something bad's gonna happen, I can feel it in my bones."

"That's arthritis."

"Very funny. Please, let's go back to the car."

"You're the one who wanted to see this place. 'Can we go see it? Can we, can we?' Well, now we're here. And I don't leave till I've been up that tower. You stay here and wait, if you want, but I'm going up." Jerking his arm free, he stepped toward the dark entryway.

"Don't leave me here."

"Stay or come, make up your mind."

"Deke, please! We shouldn't be here. I can feel it."

"Sure. See you later. Probably won't take me half an hour."

He entered the opening, and began to climb the spiral stairs. His shoes made loud scuffing sounds on the concrete. He realized, by the fourth stair, that there was no handrail.

"Wait!" Val cried. "Don't leave me!"

"Then put a move on." He waited until she reached the step below him. "Stay close," he said, and continued to climb.

The stairs were shaped like wedges, a foot wide near the outer wall and tapering down to nothing at Deke's right. He stayed close to the wall. He kept his left hand against its cool, damp stone.

After one full turn of the stairs, the light from below was lost. The stairway was dark except for a thin band of light from a window slit.

"Deke, let's go back."

"Forget it."

"I feel like I'm gonna fall."

You must be psychic, he thought, and grinned. "Just keep a hand on the wall," he advised. As he spoke, his right foot found only enough stair for his toes, and slipped off. His knee slammed the concrete "Damn!" he snapped.

"I told you"

"Shut up."

THEY KEPT CLIMBING WITH ONLY THE LIGHT from the window slits to show the way. Once, the light vanished so completely that Deke could see nothing. Disoriented and dizzy, he stopped climbing. He flinched as Val touched his back.

"It's getting to you, isn't it?" she asked.

"Nothing's getting to me but the darkness. I'll be okay in a minute."

"Let's go down, Deke."

"We're almost to the top."

"How do you know?"

"Don't worry, I know."

As he started to climb again, his legs felt shaky.

"How're we gonna get down?" Val asked.

"Walk," he said.

"It'll be dark outside. We won't be able to see a thing."

"So we spend the night."

"I don't want to. Now now. It's all too creepy."

"Suit yourself."

He suddenly saw light above him. "Ha! We made it!" He hurried up the final stairs, and stepped through the doorway. Directly in front of him, back to the tower wall, sat a man.

"Is it come to kiss the stone, are you?" he asked in an accent Deke took for Irish. He wore an old grey jacket, and baggy trousers with leather knee patches. He had a sly look on his face.

"What stone?"

Val stepped up beside Deke. She smiled when she saw the stranger.

"Why, the Herlihy Stone. Have you not heard of it, then?"

Deke shook his head.

The man stood up, using a blackthorn walking stick. A young, powerfully-built man, he didn't appear to need the stick. "You know of the Blarney Stone, no doubt?" he asked. "It's a bit of marble you find on a castle wall near Cork, in Ireland."

"If you kiss it," said Val, "it's good luck."

"A common bit of misinformation that's on your tongue, ma'am. It's not good luck you'll be getting from the Blarney Stone, but the gift of eloquence. Your tongue'll walk circles 'round all who listen, and they'll not understand a word of it. That's the gift of the Blarney Stone. Now you take the Herlihy Stone, it's a different story altogether. One kiss of it, and you'll stay forever young."

"I've never heard of the Herlihy Stone," Val said.

"It's not many as have. We don't let it get around, you see. It's a hundred years the Herlihy's have kept this castle keep, and we've all been modest men. We like our quiet and solitude. We like a bit of desolation, for it's calming to the soul. Crowds are the curse of God, after all, and it's surely crowds we'd be getting if the gift of our stone got around. A few wanderers, now and again, put money enough in our pockets. We are not greedy men."

"What does it cost to kiss this stone of yours?" Deke asked, trying to keep the anger and frustration out of his voice. All that work, all that climbing, for this! He should've guessed the castle wouldn't be deserted. Val had been right, for a change. Lucky Val.

"Would two-fifty a head be too dear?" the man wanted to know.

"Two dollars and fifty cents?" Val asked.

"That's all it would cost, and you'd have a kiss of the Herlihy Stone and never lose your youth."

Val smiled. "I wish I'd come here thirty years ago."

"I shouldn't worry. It's still a lovely woman you are."

She gave Deke a superior, accusing smile, as if he'd been too ignorant to notice the qualities so obvious to this stranger.

"Go ahead and kiss the damned thing," Deke said. "What've you got to lose?"

"Before you decide, have a look at the stone itself." The man pointed his stick at a gap between the stone walkway and the parapet.

"Step up and have a look."

Deke and Val moved closer.

"My God!" Val said.

KNEELING BESIDE THE GAP, THE MAN REACHED DOWN with his cane and tapped the wall. "There's your Herlihy Stone, the bit of marble down there."

Two hundred feet below the bit of marble, waves crashed and exploded against the rocks of the promontory.

"It's not so dangerous as it might appear," the man said. "You must sit on the edge of the walk here and lean back, same as if you were giving the Blarney Stone a kiss. I'll be holding your legs, of course."

"How many have you lost?" Deke asked, and grinned.

The man grinned back. "Hardly enough to mention."

"Well," Val said, "I don't think I'm up to it. I really don't."

"A good many folk feel that way, at first. I must tell you with all my heart, however, a kiss of the Herlihy Stone will keep you young, indeed. How would you guess my age?"

"Thirty?" Val tried.

"And you, sir?" he asked Deke.

"Thirty-five?"

"It's eighty-three I'll be come October."

Deke laughed.

"Fifty years it's been since I kissed the Herlihy Stone."

"Sure," Deke said.

"Is it a liar you're after calling me?"

Deke considered the man's size, and the walking stick. "No. Not me. Go ahead and kiss the stone, Val. Look what it did for him."

She shook her head.

"I'll be holding your legs good and tight, ma'am. My hands have not failed me yet."

"Well . . ."

Deke could see that, inspite of her hesitation, she wanted to go ahead with it. Did she really believe the garbage about eternal youth?

She couldn't be that stupid.. More likely, she was looking forward to the feel of those big, powerful hands pressing down on her legs.

"Okay," she said. "I'm game. Deke?"

Maybe he could figure a way to lose her through the hole. Grinning, he took out his billfold. He handed the man three dollars.

"It'll be five dollars for you and the lady both."

"Right. You owe me fifty cents."

"Are you not going to kiss the stone yourself, then?"

"You kidding?"

"Deke, you've got to."

"I haven't *got* to. You go ahead and have your fun, you two. I'll watch."

"Deke, please! Don't you want to stay young?"

"Do you believe that bunk?" Deke pointed at the small slab of marble. "He ought to call it the Hooey Stone."

"Well, I'm doing it anyway."

"Be my guest. I'm not trying to stop you."

"Okay then," Val said.

The man reached into a pocket and took out a pair of quarters. "Your change, sir."

Deke put them away. He zipped his coat against the cold wind.

The man tapped his stick on a stone platform beside the gap. "If you've any valuables in your pockets, ma'am, set them here or they'll be in for a great long fall."

Val put her purse on the platform. She took gloves from her coat pockets. Last, she removed her glasses. The man held her arm as she sat down on the walkway, her back to the battlements.

Deke grinned. "Say, do you want *me* to hold your legs?"

"No," Val said. "That's okay."

"Come on. Why not?"

"I couldn't allow it," the man intervened. "It's *I* must do the holding."

"I don't see why."

"It's the rules, sir."

"Who's rules?"

"If you wish the lady to kiss the stone, it's *I* must hold her. I'll not be arguing about it."

Deke shrugged as if it were unimportant. "Do it your own way," he said.

As the man knelt beside Val, Deke glanced at the blackthorn stick. Its knobby handle looked lethal. A good bash at the right instant, he could wipe them both out. Unfortunately, the stick was propped

against the parapet within the man's reach.

"Ready?"

Val nodded.

The man gripped her thighs. "Now gently lie backwards. Aye. Don't be afraid."

Deke watched her head lower into the gap. He glanced at the blackthorn stick.

What if he couldn't nail the guy? He'd stand little chance against a strong, young man like that.

Val was bent backwards like a bow, her shoulders and head completely out of sight.

Now or never!

Never, Deke decided. Not up here. Not with this fellow to deal with. He'd wait for a better chance. Maybe the dark stairs on the way down. Or the footbridge.

"Have you kissed the Herlihy Stone?" the man called down.

"Yes," came Val's strained voice.

He flipped her legs upward, and let go. Deke watched, astonished, as Val's feet vanished through the gap.

She screamed for a long time.

THE MAN PICKED UP HIS BLACKTHORN STICK and got to his feet.

Deke backed away. "What're you doing?" he demanded. "You dropped her on purpose!"

"I surely did, and there's no denying it. Now it's your turn, sir, to kiss the stone." He raised the stick to his shoulder and stepped toward Deke.

"No! Stay back!"

The stick cut through the air and pounded Deke's shoulder. His arm went numb. The next blow glanced off his head. Dazed, he dropped to his knees.

"It's down you go," said the man, dragging him to the gap. His back bent painfully as he was lowered headfirst. He saw the smooth marble inches from his face.

"Have you kissed it yet?"

"No!"

"Doesn't matter, actually."

"Let me up!"

"I can't do that. It's my job. It's the family line, so to speak, conferring the gift of the Herlihy Stone." As he let go of Deke's legs, he called, "You'll not grow old now, my friend, not at all!"

She was beautiful — and quite guilty. David Morgan thought the first of these facts was more interesting!

Counselor at Law

by CARL PANZRAN

HER BLOND HAIR HAD A SHINE TO IT and a trace of warm colors — amber, red, and orange. That's the first thing David Morgan noticed. Then he saw that she was at least ten years younger than his thirty-five, about four inches taller than his five foot eight, and as pretty and as slim as a *Vogue* model.

There were several stepped-upon cigarette ends outside his office door. He was returning from a quick lunch, and they hadn't been there when he left. If they were all hers, she was extremely nervous. The way she was unconsciously twisting her large handbag seemed to confirm that diagnosis.

He slipped his key into the lock of his door. The frosted glass was lettered:

David Morgan,
Counselor at Law

The other attorneys in the building all had their doors lettered *Attorney at Law*. Morgan liked to think that the difference indicated was one of style, not quality. He preferred to aid his clients without resorting to briefs, courtrooms, or even the mildest legal mumbo jumbo.

"Mr. Morgan?" she asked. She had a husky voice.

"Yes?" he replied, pushing open the door.

The office was a mess. Papers and open law books covered almost every available surface. He picked up a stack of papers from the seat of the chair beside the desk and added it to the pile on one of the book-cases.

"Everything is in chronological order," he explained, offering her the seat with a wave of the hand. "The first things I dropped are on the bottom, the last ones are on top."

She didn't crack a smile. She just looked confused and sat down, clutching her large handbag on her lap with both hands like a child with a security blanket.

Morgan took his place behind the desk and sat back. When she said nothing, he raised his eyebrows quizzically and waited a few more beats. More silence.

Finally, he asked, "What brings you here, Miss . . . Miss?"

"Heller . . . Louise Heller," she said. "I . . . I saw your name in the newspaper a month ago. I . . . I figured any lawyer who would file over a hundred pre-trial motions in a misdemeanor case had to be a fighter."

IT HAD BEEN A TACTIC TO INSURE THAT PLEA-BARGAINING would be less difficult in the future. No one wanted to go through that again, least of all himself. He didn't tell her this, though, nor that his client in that case had been found guilty, anyhow, and that the judge had reprimanded him for causing the state unnecessary court costs. Instead, he asked, "You mean you remembered my name all this time?"

"I wrote it down so I wouldn't forget."

Morgan smiled. "Then you must have known a month ago that you would be needing an attorney. Why didn't you see me then?"

"Well . . . I hoped I wouldn't need you." She gripped her bag tighter and her knuckles whitened. Then the words poured out in a rush. "I hoped by some miracle I'd be able to put the money back, but I couldn't. And the bank examiners will be there tomorrow morning."

Morgan decided to take a shortcut through what promised to be a long story. "Do you work in a bank?" he asked.

Louise nodded.

"And your accounts are short?"

She nodded again.

"How short?"

"Ten thousand dollars. Can you help me?"

He sat up and pulled his chair closer to the desk. Then he asked, "How much money do you have?"

She fumbled with the catch on her handbag. "I have two hundred dollars," she said, reaching inside.

"Don't you have any savings?"

She stopped with her hand inside the bag. "No."

"How about friends and relatives. Don't you have a few of them who would be willing to lend you some money to help you out of this mess?"

She hung her head. "There's no one."

"Come on, Louise. You're an attractive woman. You must have a boy friend or two who would be willing to help you with a small loan."

A muffled, "No."

Morgan drummed his fingers, searching for an inspiration, while she stacked some small bills on the edge of the desk.

"No boyfriends? None at all?" he asked.

"No. I . . . I took the money to . . . to help a man get started in a business, but it failed and he left town."

That piece of information surprised Morgan. She looked smarter than that. He got out of his chair and paced up and down between the desk and the window. Every once in a while he'd look over at her and shake his head.

At last he said, "Do you know the penalty for embezzlement in this state?"

She shook her head no.

"It's two to ten years," he told her. "And your good looks won't save you. Women's Lib has ended those days forever."

"Can't you help me?" A tear ran down her cheek, leaving a shiny trail.

"That depends upon you. Do you always do whatever a man asks of you?"

"Yes. Most of the time."

Morgan went back to his chair and sat down. "What bank did you take the money from?"

"The Merchant's National."

"And you still work there?"

"Yes."

"All right," he said. "I want you to go back to work this afternoon. Make some excuse for being late. Then take another ninety thousand dollars and bring it here."

She started to say something, but he cut her off. "If following orders got you into this mess, you can follow mine to get out. Now, you'd better get going. I'll wait for you."

AN HOUR PASSED AND THEN ANOTHER. It was almost four o'clock when she returned. She still clutched her large handbag with both hands, but now its sides bulged and her face was flushed with excitement and apprehension.

"Did you have any trouble?" he asked.

"Oh, no!" Her voice showed the surprise she felt. "It was easy. All of the bank officers were having a meeting. I just walked into the vault and took ninety thousand from the emergency cash reserve." She opened her bag and stacked bundles of neatly wrapped fifty- and hundred-dollar bills on Morgan's desk.

"Give me the telephone number of the bank," he said. "And the president's name." While the phone was ringing, he asked her, "How would you like to go to Las Vegas this weekend?"

The phone was answered, and the call had to be routed from the switchboard to the man's secretary and then to him. Louise was sitting on the edge of her chair, hanging on every word. The frightened look she had worn when she arrived earlier in the day was no longer in evidence.

Then the bank president was on the line. Morgan introduced himself and told the man, "One of your employees, Miss Louise Heller, is in my office. She has embezzled one hundred thousand dollars from your bank, a fact the examiners will soon confirm." He waited for the banker to stop sputtering at the other end of the line, then said, "If the bank will agree not to prosecute or publicize this loss, my client will return *half* the money."

There was more sputtering.

"Otherwise, it will be needed for bail and legal expenses."

David Morgan, Counselor at Law, sat back and smiled at Louise, confident that even if the bank president wanted to refuse the partial restitution, his insurance company wouldn't let him.

The attorney smiled at his lovely client. "You'll like Vegas," he told her.

Her sudden smile told Morgan that *he* was going to like it, too. ●



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The PHANTOM DETECTIVE

Though he was a more-than-passing relation to The Spider, one read *The Phantom Detective* regularly, between waiting for the monthly return of Richard Wentworth, Doc Savage, G-8 and the Shadow. Robert Wallace, the byliner, later proved to be a host of ghostwriters and to this day, authorship of these rather tame detective thrillers is a deep, dark mystery. Still, the fine Belarski covers and the regularity of *The Phantom Detective* was a blessing. D.L. Champion seems to be creator.

Richard Curtis Van Loan, playboy millionaire, turns to crime-fighting and unlike Wentworth has a crime laboratory all his own. Still, the basic ingredients are all there; Van Loan was also a master of disguise and the domino mask was his trademark. "Robert Wallace" always wrapped up his yarns with the classic confrontation sequence a la William Powell in all the Philo Vance/Nick Charles films — with the Phantom Detective nailing the killer in an all-the-suspects-gathered-for-the-solution denouement. All in all pretty standard stuff, but still a good series character with that old month-in-month-out appearance appeal.

The Phantom Detective ran from *The Emperor of Death*, Feb. 1933, to *Murder's Agent* in the summer of 1953. That's a very long pulp life by any standards and indicates the broad appeal of Van Loan. 170 full-length cases is some going in any league.

Memory is a funny thing. The inside joke on our block was how *The Phantom Detective*, in nearly every other issue, when shot in the shoulder, repaired to his crime lab apartment to dose himself up with a hypodermic needle boost and a stiff drink. We all insisted his shoulder would have worn away, eventually. In any case, Noon's or any others, *The Phantom Detective* was a pulp reading staple of the Fabulous Golden Age of Pulps — the Thirties. Wherein all things were possible.

Even send-ups on Richard Wentworth.

The man placed his gun against the dentist's head. "Tell me where the account book is — or I'll blow your brains out!" Tuttobene shivered. He didn't have an account book, and if he didn't talk fast he'd be a dead man!

The Brass Ring

by JACK MATCHA

DR. MARCO TUTTOBENE DID NOT, AS A RULE SEE ANYONE after four. It was then he left to play racquetball with one of the many show business celebrities who made his dental practice one of the most fashionable in Beverly Hills. A tall, handsome man, Tuttobene often regretted he had not gone into an acting career. Dentistry bored him. But at least it enabled him to do what he liked most: meet famous people.

More than anything he loved going to the elegant parties of the "glitterati," the big movie and TV stars. He loved to swim in the kidney-shaped pools, sit in on their poker games and occasionally be their discarded mistresses. He had played cameo roles, usually doctors, in several films and was secretly taking private acting lessos.

with one of Hollywood's best teachers. One day, he was convinced, he would open the right door, get himself a meaty role and quietly forget the entire bland tasteless business of fixing teeth.

Since he was in a hurry to get to the health club, he was annoyed when his receptionist told him that a lawyer named Northrop insisted on seeing him. Barely concealing his anger — he was sure that his estranged wife had sent the idiot to try to boost the steep alimony payments that were already strangling him — he waved the stocky, balding man holding an attache case to a chair.

"Thank you, sir," the man said as he opened the case. He held out an expensively-embossed card. "C. Welles Northrop. With the firm of Halsey, Simpson and McDevers. This won't take long."

Tuttobene had already made sure of that, directing his receptionist to interrupt them with an "emergency" ten minutes later.

Tuttobene frowned as he heard the name of the firm. He knew several of its clients, and he knew they never took on a case that involved less than a hundred thousand dollars. He was about to say something about his depleted collections when Northrop laid a shiny copy of *Journey of a Scoundrel* on his desk. The attorney smiled at the dentist's obvious relief.

"Yes, Dr. Tuttobene," he said. "You can relax. I didn't come here to double your wife's alimony." He grinned at his companion's surprised expression. "Your problems with her are pretty well known. Her threats to ask for more alimony have been in *Variety* several times. No, actually I came to offer you money, a great deal of it. Well not I, actually. Oscar Jax and his publishers, Clopper and Brown Ltd.

"I'm assuming of course that you've read the novel and know that the story's most unpleasant character bears your name."

Tuttobene smiled and shook his head. "I'd have to go around blindfolded not to know it. Everybody in town's carrying it. My name's in all the ads, even the TV ones."

"And, of course, you've had repercussions haven't you. Nasty calls, people staring at you in restaurants, bars." The lawyer's voice was angry, indignant and sympathetic.

The dentist shrugged. "It'll pass. I've got other things to worry about. Oh sure I've taken a lot of guff. It's not much fun being taken for a man who murdered three people in their teens, then surfaces as a dope ring figure out here. I'm glad Jax made him a chiropractor instead of a dentist. Actually, I don't care anymore."

"Would you care again for five hundred thousand dollars?" the lawyer asked softly. "Tax free!"

"FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND?" Tuttobene repeated incredulously. "You're going to ask them that much?"

"Oh, we're going to ask for much more than that," Northrop corrected. "That's just our bottom figure for you. A million is what we'll go in with. Providing, of course you agree to our terms of letting us keep one third for representing you and forty percent if we go to court. Plus expenses. In any case, you can certainly count on the bottom figure."

Tuttobene listened in a mild daze. It sounded unreal. Half a million! Still, it was true that the book had led the best seller list of the New York Times for eighteen weeks and was sold to a paperback house for over two million. Negotiations had just started with major film companies who were bidding for the movie rights. He had even thought himself of suing when he read the item in the showbiz papers he subscribed to. But his attorney had quickly disabused him of the idea.

He shook his head sadly now. "I'm afraid I'm ahead of you, counselor. It won't work. Jax told an interviewer from the L.A. Times weeks ago that he picks his characters' names out of phone books and that he leans toward exotic ones. Apparently mine was the most exotic he could find, but that's the only connection between us. He said he didn't know me from Adam when he wrote the book in Europe. He saw it in a Beverly Hills phone book in a film studio office in Paris. Frankly, my attorney was praying for some good connection." He sighed. "So was I. I could use the money."

"Your prayers have been answered," Northrop said.

Tuttobene's eyebrows shot up. "What are you talking about? I never saw Jax in my life. I never had anything to do with him."

"Wrong on both counts," the lawyer said. He fished the photograph of a middle aged man from the depths of his case. "This man says you had plenty to do with Jax."

The dentist stared incredulously at the picture. "Who's this?"

The attorney coughed and pushed a sheaf of papers under the dentist's nose. "He's someone who can definitely prove there is an excellent connection, a connection that can prove, moreover, that Jax not only libeled you but did so out of malice."

"But how . . . I mean who . . ."

Northrop held up his hand. "I'm afraid the rest is privileged information unless you're our client." He smiled disarmingly. "You really can't expect us to make your case for another attorney."

Before Tuttobene could say anything more, there was a sharp knock on the door followed by the entrance of his breathless receptionist. "Excuse me for interrupting, sir. You're needed at the Cedars of

Lebanon immediately, Mr. Rosten is in severe pain following the oral surgery."

"I'll leave in a moment," her employer said, nodding quickly in dismissal. He bent over the contract, signed several copies and waited impatiently as Northrop inspected them.

Glancing up to see that they were alone, Northrop held out the picture he had showed earlier. "This man will testify that on three occasions you not only fought with Jax but that he threatened to get even with you if it were the last thing he did. His name is Harry Mimms."

"Never heard of him. Never laid eyes on him."

Northrop leaned forward. "When you were a student at the Columbia University dental school, do you remember how you made your expenses?"

"I used to work as an extra bartender at various bars in Manhattan. Mostly on weekends and holidays."

"Was one of them the Golden Pear in the East Fifties? The popular singles bar?"

"More often there than anyplace else. The owner knew my family and let me work whenever I could." Tuttobene smiled, remembering. "The tips were fabulous and the boss let me keep all of them. And he let me study for exams in his office during my breaks. But I don't see what all that has to do with — "

"Harry Mimms was there the times you threw Oscar Jax out for being drunk and shouting obscenities. Not just once . . . *three* times. The third time he was furious because his friends walked out on him. He tried to throw a bottle at you which Mimms blocked. Then he rushed at you. You beat him up and threw him out."

Tuttobene laughed. "Counselor, I'm telling you I don't remember ever meeting Harry Mimms."

"That's understandable. He was one of many waiters there. But I assure you he was there. We have his work records. Odd you don't remember him. He remembers you quite well, because you helped his daughter Ann with a dental problem and charged him nothing. That's why he came forward when he read the book." Northrop rose. "I'm keeping you from your appointment." He held out his hand.

"You really think you can swing this?" Tuttobene said doubtfully as he shook the lawyer's hand.

"Positive," Northrop said. "Jax has admitted in several interviews that he draws heavily from his own experiences and people he knows. And they'll be shaking in their boots. Any real threat to blocking the paperback edition and the movie will drive them insane. You realize

what that can cost them?" The lawyer cleared his throat and continued in a business-like tone. "Now I want you to start growing a moustache like the character in the novel . . . wear nothing but light colored suits like him . . . oh and make it a point to order only vodka stingers wherever you go. And it wouldn't hurt to have a reproduction of Picasso's two headed woman in both your bathrooms just like Jax's scoundrel."

"You've created quite a scenario," the dentist said admiringly.

"How do you like it so far?" Northrop asked, his eyes twinkling.
"How do you feel about it now?"

"Like a kid on a merry-go-round who's just closed his fingers around the brass ring. What happens next?"

"I'll let you know," Northrop said as he moved to the door. "But I can guarantee one thing. Your phone will be ringing off the hook as soon as your suit hits the media."

A WEEK LATER THE FULL BLAST OF IT HIT HIM. It seemed as if everyone in the world had either read the story or seen it on the seven o'clock news. And Northrop had understated what would follow. Not only was his phone ringing incessantly as reporters tried to see him and numerous others swelled his patient list. He discovered that he was in greater demand than ever as glitterati who had previously ignored him, begged him to come to dinner. Night after night, he found himself sitting at tables full of Oscar winners, cabinet officers visiting from Washington, Hollywood superagents, millionaire jockeys and baseball stars, all of whom he delighted with his carefully embroidered tale of Northrop's visit and his line about grasping the brass ring.

Late one afternoon as he dressed for an exclusive party, he was surprised to see a tall, burly stranger clad in a rumpled gray suit enter his bedroom. As Tuttobene wondered how he could get the gun under his pillow, the stranger aimed a small but efficient looking pistol at him, then sighed.

"This was much easier than I dreamed," said the intruder. "I was sure with all that loot coming in you'd have bodyguards, Tuttobene. By the way, that's an interesting monicker you picked. I could see why they never caught up with you."

"Look, I don't have much cash in the house," Tuttobene said evenly, trying not to rile the burglar. He picked up his wallet from the dresser. "I've got ninety here. And you can have my watch. It's an Oyster worth a few hundred used."

The newcomer laughed. "Hell man, I'm not a thief. I'm a bounty hunter. I've been looking for you since the book came out. There's a good price on your head, Rushworth."

"Who's Rushworth?" Tuttobene asked, nonplussed.

"Come on, amigo, let's not play the dumb act. I don't take these cases without checking all the facts. Your real name is Dwight C. Rushworth and you killed your stepfather when you was seventeen. Two others later. You disappeared after the war, got yourself another name, went to dental school and came out here." The stranger frowned. "Tuttobene means all goes well in Eyetalian, right? 'Fraid that ain't true no more friend. Oh by the way, my name's Dancy Williams. I make my living this way. And I'm grateful to you. You're my biggest bounty yet. Let's go now. I still got time for a good barbecue dinner after I turn you over to the lawmen, and I hear there are some great places in L.A."

"Wait a minute," Tuttobene yelled as Williams handcuffed him. "You've made a big mistake. I had nothing to do . . ."

"No mistake," Williams said placidly. "I checked. Oscar Jax's stuff's all based on facts. He never invents anything. Just kind of camouflages it some. I figured you for Rushworth soon as I read the book. You surprise me though, still wearing light suits and that moustache. But then I seen other people get careless."

"I swear to you I'm not Rushworth."

"Stop lying," Williams said angrily, moving his gun to the dentist's head. "I've spent a lot of time on this case . . . Now let's have that account book your keep with the dope pushers working for you . . . the one described in detail in the book. Move!"

"I'm telling the truth," Tuttobene said, trembling as Williams cocked his gun. "Don't shoot, for God's sake. Don't shoot . . . Look I can prove I've always been Tuttobene. If you look in the lower right desk drawer in the next room you'll find my birth certificate, my college diploma, pictures of me and my parents . . ."

"What the hell do you take me for — a damned idiot?" Williams roared. "Everybody forges stuff like that for their cover. Tell me where that damned account book is before I count to three or I'll blow whatever brains you got left . . . one . . . two . . ."

"Wait . . . wait," Tuttobene implored. "Let me explain . . . This whole thing was engineered by my lawyer. He asked me to dress like this, grow the moustache" As Williams continued to press the cold steel to his temple, the dentist told him everything the lawyer had arranged, including the false testimony of Harry Mimms. When he finished, Williams put his gun away.

"Thank you very much, Doctor," he said quietly, dropping the rustic accent. "I thank you and Clopper and Brown thank you. You can go now."

"Clopper . . ." Tuttobene began bewilderedly.

"I work for Jax's publishers as a private investigator. You had them on the ropes for a while," Williams said approvingly, "with that yarn and especially with Mimms. And they would have settled out of court if you hadn't spilled it all tonight."

Tuttobene blinked. "That won't hold up in court! I'll deny it."

"This will hold up," Williams said calmly, showing him the slim cassette recorder beneath his jacket that had preserved it all."

As the dentist groaned, the detective patted his arm consolingly. "Don't feel too bad. Remember what Robert Browning said.

"What's that?" Tuttobene asked dully, seeing the brass ring recede.

"A man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for."

When the man had gone, Tuttobene threw back his head and laughed uproariously. What the hell, he hadn't wanted to go through with it anyway. Besides, it had been fun while it lasted. And he'd made plenty of new contacts, too. Maybe it was time to give up dentistry and really become an actor.

He chuckled. He might even try out for the lead part in *Journey of a Scoundrel!*

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Jog in the cemetery at night? Sure, why not? What was there to be afraid of?

Night Run

by WILLIAM L. STORY

ONE OF ALISON BRADLEY'S RULES WAS NEVER TO DO anything out of spite. But tonight she knew she was doing just that, although she didn't know whom she was spiting — Doug or herself.

It had begun as a rational enough conversation that afternoon over lunch. She and her fiance, Doug Symonds, had been discussing the woman's role in the modern world, a topic about which they shared similar liberal views. Or so she had thought until Doug began espousing chauvinistic attitudes on male courage. At first Alison had thought he was kidding her, but as the discussion continued it became clear that he seriously believed the male's bravery quotient was greater than that of the female.

Doug had maintained that a man could better face up to a physical

danger than a woman could. When she had demurred, he said, "Oh, come on, Alison, don't give me that line about quiet bravery in undramatic situations. I know a woman might be able to keep a brave vigil over a sick child, for example, and that's a type of courage I admit. But I mean for pure guts in a threatening situation, the male—all right, I'll qualify that—*most* men could face up to a danger but *most* women could not."

"*Doug.* I'm surprised at you. I really am."

"Look, Alison, I'm merely stating a fact. It doesn't alter my views on things like 'equal pay for equal work' and so on. There *are* some biological and emotional differences between men and women. Don't think in terms of superiority and inferiority but simply as differences. Most men are physically—muscularly—stronger than women. They're better equipped to face a danger, and this breeds confidence or courage, if you will, in them. On the other hand, women are better equipped physically and temperamentally for some tasks than men. That doesn't make them superior, either. Just different."

Then the conversation had become childish as Doug cited examples ranging from marines storming Mt. Suribachi to the matador gallantly disposing the bull in the ring. "You'll note it's a bull, not a cow, he fights," Doug had said.

FINALLY, HE HAD MENTIONED THE CEMETERY. Alison and Doug both jogged, often together, on a path that looped about a mile and a half around inside the high, ornate fence of the cemetery. "Take the cemetery," he had said. "I bet you wouldn't dare run there at night." They always ran during the daylight, mornings or late afternoon. Occasionally, Doug at night ran the indoor track at the Y.

She had giggled. It was so childish, so ludicrous, Doug sitting there nursing a martini, handsome and sophisticated in business suit, daring her like a little boy taunting a little girl. *I dare you to run in the cemetery at night*, she could envision Doug the little boy saying. *I bet you're too scared.*

Nettled by her giggling, he had said, "It wouldn't bother me. As a matter of fact, I'll do it. Tomorrow night. You can wait for me in the car. I'd go tonight if it wasn't for that damn conference."

She had stifled her giggling and touched his hand. "I'll have to spend my evening with the tube or reading a book. Pretty poor substitutes for being with you."

AFTER LEAVING DOUG AT THE RESTAURANT, she had driven back to work, occasionally smiling to herself as she thought of the

conversation. Doug was always so confident and self-assured that such male strutting surprised her. She mused on the facets of character that occasionally revealed themselves for the first time in one with whom she was so familiar.

Perhaps it had been Phil Santarelli's comment to her at work after she had left Doug which crystallized her decision to run in the cemetery that night by herself. She had been thinking of Doug's remarks, her amusement turning to indignation, when Phil had said, "Look, Alison, all I want you to do is tell Pauling that we don't think the new line is right for us. We'll continue with the old for a while longer. But, God, if you're afraid to speak up, then I will. It's just that timing is important. I won't be at the meeting next week when he'll be more receptive to arguments. You know how he is. You've got to present your case at what he considers the appropriate time. You're assistant manager of this department and he'll know you're speaking in my behalf."

It wasn't fear of speaking up to Pauling that deterred Alison. It was just that this was so typical. She was the department assistant to Phil and yet he often shouldered decision making and unpleasant jobs on her. His was the credit and the salary even though she knew her background — business degree from Simmons — was better than his.

"No, Phil," she had said, "I'm not *afraid* to speak up to Pauling. As a matter of fact, I will. But admit it. *You're* the manager. *You* hold the position and get the salary that says *you're* responsible for policy in this department. When Pauling blows his stack at being thwarted — and he will — I'll get the brunt of it. Not you."

SO NOW HERE SHE WAS DRIVING THROUGH THE COLUMNS of the front gate of the cemetery to prove that which didn't need proving. Was she being the little girl responding to the taunts, she wondered. *I can too run in the cemetery at night. I dare.* She'd have to wait a week to confront Pauling, but the cemetery she would confront now.

The crisp November night was chilly and Alison shivered as she locked the car. Inwardly, she admitted to a certain apprehension but then laughed at the absurdity of her qualms. At twenty-four she was mature and sensible enough to drive away childish fantasies of ghosts, ghouls, and other late-night-type horrors. There was nothing intrinsically dangerous in running in a cemetery in the dark of night.

Alison checked her watch in the moonlight. Almost eight o'clock. Doug said that the gates were closed at ten, but she would be finished long before then. She would do her two laps, a total of three miles, in about twenty-five minutes. Not a great turn of speed but all-in all very creditable for one who had been running less than a year. Especially

for a woman, she thought and then smiled inwardly. There *are* physical differences, she acknowledged. Doug was much faster. After running two laps with her, he would often run another two in about 20 minutes while she cooled off and read interesting tombstones. Parts of the cemetery were very old. The oldest tombstone she had found so far whose inscription hadn't been obliterated by time and weather was dated 1753.

ALISON TIGHTENED THE LACES OF HER RUNNING SHOES and pulled the woolen cap snugly over just the tops of her ears so that her hearing was not obscured. She adjusted the belt of her sweatpants, pulled the zipper to her sweatjacket up to her chin, and put on her mittens.

Rather angrily she stifled an excitement and eagerness to begin the run, telling herself that there was no more need to feel excitement than to feel apprehension. Excitement was, after all, simply part of the same spectrum as fear. There was no need to feel anything different from what she felt while running here at daylight.

She began the methodical leg-stretching exercises that she and Doug always preceded a run with. Raise a leg high, lower it. Once, twice . . . six times. Then the other. Now rise slowly on toes, stretching calves, then down. Repeat, up — hold — down. Up — hold — down. And now the deep-knee bends. Slowly, squat down on haunches, up, arms extended to balance, down, up. Six times.

Finally, the slow, warming-up trot around the caretaker's vine-covered cottage. Alison liked to pretend that the cemetery was an estate, *her* estate. She pictured herself as its elegant young mistress who daily, with her handsome husband, jogged around her grounds acknowledging deferential hat tippings and 'morning ma'am's from the gardeners and groundskeepers in her employ.

She envisioned herself coming down to this cottage, her chief groundskeeper's, on some matter or other, her presence causing a bustle and stir. Graciously, she'd decline coffee and little cakes offered her by the man's wife. She was loved by her staff.

The path she was trotting wound around the cottage and behind the greenhouse, an oasis of fronds and blooms in the chill New England air. Overhead, the crescent moon's dim light was obscured by the tunnel of branches of the vase-like elms on either side of the path. To her left, just before she swung around the greenhouse and back up to the cottage, was the old, red-granite, gargoyleed structure which she and Doug assumed was a chapel. It, too, was vine covered and looked very Victorian with its heavy oaken door, sharply pitched roof, and

ornate, grotesque carvings at the cornices. Alison had not quite determined its role in her fantasized estate.

Picking up her pace just a little but breathing easily she swung alongside the greenhouse and back up around to her car. Her warmup complete, she walked around the little rotary inside the gate and prepared to begin her run. She wondered who closed the gates at ten. There was no evidence of anyone about.

She paused a moment before beginning her run around the mile and a half loop. The sliver of moon afforded little light and as she glanced up she could see that bands of clouds would at time obliterate that completely.

She looked at her car and hesitated. *Take the cemetery. I bet you wouldn't dare run there at night.* Ohmigod, how inane. She was allowing herself to be goaded by a juvenile taunt. She was in her way behaving as badly as Doug. *I do so dare.* She would get in the car, drive home, shower, read a book, and wait for Doug's call. Not because she was afraid to run. That she had established. But because the whole issue was so silly, so childish. Because there *was* no issue. Well, if there was no issue, why not run? She pictured herself on the phone later responding to Doug's, "What did you do tonight?" with a casual, "Oh, nothing much. Read a little after I ran about 8 o'clock. Where? Why, in the cemetery, of course. Where else?"

SHE TURNED FROM THE CAR and began her rhythmic stride along the path. Pale moonlight filtered through the pines and gnarled, bare oaks.

She felt good. Her legs were light and alive and she was breathing easily. It was funny how you could tell almost right away whether it would be an easy run or not. She was sure she was moving quickly, too. Quickly and effortlessly. Of course, she admitted, the dark night contributed an illusion of speed. She would time herself but, peering at her watch, she could not make out the position of the hands. The devil with it. She'd just run and enjoy it.

The path ran straight almost a quarter mile before looping to the right and winding down beside the little willow-girded pond at the extreme end of the cemetery and then bending back toward the front gate.

The cemetery was beautiful and she had fallen in love with it when Doug brought her here to run for the first time almost a year ago. She supposed it was strange to say that you loved a cemetery, but she did. It was far prettier, more peaceful and better cared for than any of the public parks she knew. There was seldom anyone here except the care-

takers who always gave a friendly wave and an occasional other jogger or dog walker. She had never even seen a funeral group in the time she had been running here.

Alison swung to the right and plunged into deepening darkness as the path bent toward the pond a half-mile away. From this point until she returned to the front gate the path ran at least 100 feet inside the high, spiked fence that separated the cemetery from the public street with its artificial illumination. She began to hum under her breath and abruptly chided herself for this symptom of fright.

Many of the tombstones here in one of the oldest sections of the cemetery dated back to the Revolution. They jutted at various angles, knocked askew by time, weather, and probing tree roots. She wondered whether the occupants of the graves had been disturbed by the roots as over the centuries they sucked deeply into the earth for nourishment.

There was one stone in particular that had intrigued her. Nestled under an old, massive oak whose silhouette she could perceive shortly ahead in the gloom to the right, it simply bore the nearly indistinguishable inscription:

Rueben Lathrop
October 27, 1756
May 11, 1777

Had he died in the war? Alison was fascinated at the thought of powdered-wigged men and their ladies who had gathered in mourning on this very ground. They had wept; they had gone home with their grief to their routines. Had they been aware of the significance of the struggle that was being waged? How had the cemetery looked then? She tried to picture the scene; the horse-drawn carriages, the clothing.

SUDDENLY, THE LIGHT FROM THE MOON WAS TURNED OFF by a cloud passing over its face. Gradually, Alison's eyes re-adjusted to this new darkness but, even though she knew the path well, she was surprised at her difficulty in seeing her footing. Then a realistic fear struck her. She cursed the imaginary dangers that had obscured the actual dangers of a night run. What if she fell and sprained or broke a limb? What if she were attacked by whoever it might be that drank here at night? She and Doug had occasionally seen beer, wine, or whisky bottles strewn about before the caretakers got to them.

She toyed with turning around and walking back to the car. *Most men are stronger than women. They're better equipped to face a danger. This breeds courage in them.* Still, a broken ankle or a mutilated body would prove nothing except that she had acted like a foolish

little girl.

As quickly as it had disappeared, the moon came back out. Alison told herself that it would be foolish to turn back; she was almost half-way around. She would complete the lap, but if the moon went back in she would slow to a walk. That was only being practical. And if she suspected any danger, she would not run a second lap.

Her stride lengthened and her pace quickened as she hit the long decline that led down to the pond. This was her favorite part of the run. Besides being downhill, it was perhaps the prettiest section of the cemetery with its little pond snuggled into the abundant trees and shrubs.

Alison's imagined estate — brick of course, about forty rooms would suit her — would be situated here looking down toward the pond. She pictured a gala evening party with her guests strolling out in the moonlight and down to the pond.

A HEAVY MASS SUDDENLY WHIRRED FROM THE BUSHES past her head. Involuntarily, she shrieked, her reverie shattered, as the object brushed her and she felt her pulse beat a tattoo in her throat. Just as quickly, she recognized the mass and a wave of relief swept her. She giggled nervously but felt weak and winded. Pheasant. She and Doug had seen them here along with the many squirrels and countless beautiful song birds. She'd tell Doug the most frightening part of the run was being brushed by a startled pheasant. She'd admit to a fleeting moment of near panic.

She was at the bottom of the decline now and it was quite bright here as the moonlight reflected off the water. The path swung abruptly to the right through a tunnel of drooping willow branches and forsythia. The price for the downhill run now had to be paid as the path gradually inclined its way back toward the main gate.

Alison concentrated on not allowing her pace to slacken too much as she leaned a little into the rise, telling herself that this was the best part of the workout. Breathing deeply, she approached the crest of the incline. As she looked to her right down a gradual slope of tombstones and trees silhouetted in the moonlight, she saw a faint glimmer of light flickering in the distance. She stared at it, then lost it in an intervening bush. Puzzled, she tried to pick it up again. She thought it was a flame. There it was. No. Gone. Back again. Yes, she was positive; it was a flame — an eternal flame? Did ordinary cemeteries have them?

Quite curious, she considered investigating the light when she finished her run. Why not? She'd nearly finished one lap and the cemetery had proven itself innocuous except for startled pheasants. She

laughed to herself as she recalled her shock. She'd do her second lap and then just walk down to see whether the light was an eternal flame. That discovery would impress Doug.

TROTTING PAST HER CAR AND THE COTTAGE, ALISON SWUNG into her second lap very pleased with herself. She exalted in the ease of the thing. She decided she'd be quite blasé when she told Doug about the run. She must remember not to bring it up right away, as though she attached no particular importance to it. She'd casually mention it late in her conversation with him as an afterthought.

She was perspiring freely now, despite the cold, as she wound down the hill around the pond and bent into the upward slope that at least signalled the run was almost over. As she approached the crest of the hill, she peered down to where she had seen the flickering light. There it was again. She was about 100 yards from her car, and she lengthened her stride. This was her kick, albeit a modest one, the most painful part of the workout, when she was limited to concentrating only on the agony of the running process itself. Breathing deeply and rapidly as she sucked in the cold air, Alison flew past her car. Normally she walked down the path a bit and read tombstones to get the gradual cooling off essential after a run. But now she headed around the little cottage toward the chapel, some fifty yards behind which the light had appeared to her to be.

Overhung with branches and bushes, the road dipped sharply as Alison walked past the chapel. She scanned the area ahead but could not see the flicker. She breathed deeply, enjoying the sense of invigoration that follows a run. She stopped walking and, cocking her head, listened intently. There was something. It sounded like an engine idling down and to the right beyond a cluster of trees. She left the path and cut across the grass through the gravestones. There were other sounds now — people talking and, yes, digging. She was quite certain they were digging.

She reached the crest of the little knoll and peered below. A cemetery truck was pulled onto the grass amongst the gravestones and a group of men were gathered around a partially filled grave. Two of the group were shoveling dirt from the side of the grave into the hole. Three others rested on shovels, observing.

Alison watched, fascinated. She had observed the grisly ritual on occasion while running during the day and had assumed that it was confined to that time period. But there was no doubt that this was a bona-fide grave digging group. The truck was official and she recognized a couple of the men. At least the "eternal flame" was explained:

four lanterns were arranged around the grave.

But why would they fill a grave at night? It didn't make sense. Certainly the normal work day was over. Was it something devious like grave robbing? Preposterous. Alison shivered. She should keep walking. Her pores were open and she was sweating.

She looked at the truck. It was a small pickup. Several boxes and a large sack were in the bed. The men were making inconsequential small talk; hardly anything sinister there. Her gaze returned to the sack and she stared wide-eyed at it, incredulous of what the bulky outline of its contents suggested. Her pulse throbbed in her throat as she swallowed and the first traces of fear gripped her.

This was dirty business going on in front of her, she decided, and then wondered whether she was being dramatic. She should leave and — and do what? Go to the police? Maybe she was being silly. She'd tell Doug first and see what he thought.

What was there to say? Grave diggers working at night. Was that strange, unusual? She wasn't sure. She was almost sure of the contents of the sack, though, and it certainly *was* strange that the grave was being filled without those contents. And what were those contents doing in just a sack? She stared at the sack. No, she was certain now; there was no mistaking that outline.

She should go immediately. She'd tell Doug and together they'd go to the police. She'd even call him at the conference. But maybe there was some simple explanation. Indecision and curiosity subdued her urge to leave and she savored the fact that fear hadn't stampeded her. She was being very cool. She'd stay and observe a moment longer and *not* call Doug when she left. She'd report to the police herself.

ALISON DIDN'T HEAR THE SOFT STEP IN THE GRASS BEHIND her and the tough, calloused hand over her mouth locked in the startled shriek that welled up in her throat. That hand clasped tightly over her mouth and another powerful hand jammed her left arm high up behind her back.

"You struggle or scream and I'll break your arm. You understand?" Alison felt her arm being forced higher for emphasis, and the pain told her it could go no higher without something snapping.

"You understand?" the voice, deep, hoarse, demanded again.

Alison nodded against the pressure of that hand over her mouth. She rose slowly to her feet in response to that incredible pain in her arm.

"That's the girl. Now we're going to walk. You just come along nice; don't get any ideas, and you won't get hurt."

Alison felt herself being pushed quickly and roughly across the grass toward the path. On the path, she was steered toward the dark outline of the chapel.

"We're going inside," the voice said as they climbed the three steps to the heavy oak door. She was spun around back toward the cemetery as the door was opened and then spun around again and shoved into the chapel. Pain shot through her arm and shoulder as she was jostled.

The only light came from the front near a simple altar. There were two narrow rows of pews separated by a narrow center aisle with two aisles running down the sides of the chapel. Even in these circumstances, Alison noted the simplicity and rusticness of the off-white walls and pitched cathedral ceiling accented with dark beams, pews, and pulpit. The interior of the chapel was in sharp contrast with its ornate exterior.

Alison was pushed straight ahead toward an open door at the left of the altar. A short, winding flight of stairs led down to a small, plain windowless room. In the room, she felt her arm released and the voice said, "Sit down." She gingerly rolled her shoulder and massaged her numb arm with her right hand as she turned to face her captor.

He was older than she had imagined, about 60, rather heavy set. He regarded her not unkindly. "Sit down," he repeated, nodding toward one of three wooden chairs. He remained in the doorway blocking her escape. Alison sat in one of the chairs but continued to rub her arm.

"I'm sorry about that," he said. "It'll feel all right in a minute."

"Oh, that's okay," said Alison lightly. The quick retort was not her specialty. She had to be satisfied with mild irony. She was surprised at her calm, was, in fact, more interested in the situation than fearful of it.

Actually, more than anything, she was angry with her inability to resist her capture. She had given no resistance at all. He didn't look particularly formidable despite his bulk, and she attributed her submission to being surprised from behind. She wished that she had taken one of those courses in self-defense or judo that she was always reading about.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"Oh, don't worry," he said with a smile. Alison thought he was trying to look encouraging but didn't quite know how to. "We just want to ask you a few questions."

"I'm the one who should be asking you the questions." Her boldness continued to delight her. She studied the man, waiting for him to begin his interrogation. He was dressed in green work pants, brown

work boots, and dirty, brown corduroy jacket. He returned her gaze but asked no questions.

She turned from him and looked around the little room. It was lighted by a single overhead fluorescent lamp whose glare was mitigated somewhat by light green cement walls. The wall behind her was interrupted by a heavy vault-type door with levers and gauges to one side of it. In front of the door was a long, narrow stainless steel table with wheels. It looked like one of those hospital tables for wheeling patients, Alison thought.

Turning back toward the man, Alison considered bolting straight at him with flailing knees, elbows, and fingernails. If she got past him, he'd never catch her. Her arm was still a bit sore and she decided to allow it a moment longer to recover. But, she vowed, she would not submit meekly again.

The room was chilly — she could see her breath condensing — and Alison shivered against the damp of her perspiration under her sweat clothes. This was a sure way to catch a cold, she thought irrelevantly.

"You cold?" the man asked. "Don't worry, you'll be warm soon enough," he said smiling enigmatically. He turned to the sound of slow, methodical steps on the stairs behind him.

BREATHING HARD, TWO OF THE DIGGERS AT THE GRAVE shuffled into the room carrying the sack Alison had seen on the truck. It swung heavily between them as they walked past her and laid it roughly on the metal table.

One of the men went to the levers beside the vault-like door and worked them until Alison heard a sudden woosh followed by a muffled roar. The other jerked suddenly at the sack and pulled it free from its contents. Alison raised her hand to her mouth but couldn't completely stifle a startled gasp.

On the table lay a middle-aged man, graying hair mussed from the sack. His rigid, bloodless features were set into impassivity. He was dressed in conservative business suit, shirt, and tie. Naked legs thrust out stiffly from his suit top. He had no trousers.

Alison stared in morbid fascination. Her bravado dissipated and she knew she was trembling slightly.

"Is that your VW parked by the main gate?" asked the man who had worked the levers, coming over to Alison.

"What? Uh, yes." She broke her gaze from the table.

"Give me the keys."

She hesitated, considered bolting, but decided the odds were too high right now.

"Give me your key, lady."

Alison removed her mittens, reached inside her sweat jacket for the little pocket, and pulled out her keys.

"Thanks." He regarded her closely a moment. "Lady, what the hell possessed you to run in a cemetery at night. I mean *no* one comes here at night except for a few winos and some kids once in a while to tip stones." He shook his head sadly.

"What are you going to do?"

"How much did she see?" he asked her captor.

"Too much."

He went back to the vault-like door and opened it. Sheets of almost white flame shot straight up with a steady roar. Alison could feel the blast of heat across the room.

He turned the metal table so that the naked feet of its passenger were pointed into the furnace. With his companion, he shoved the shoulders of the cadaver and it slid from the table into the furnace. He slammed the door shut tight. Alison thought she was going to be sick.

Without looking at her, the two men walked past Alison to the doorway. "We'll clean up outside," said the one who had taken Alison's keys. "You know what to do here," he added. "No choice."

As their footsteps faded up the stair way, Alison suddenly screamed at her captor, "Look, I want to know what is going on here! What are you going to do with me?"

"Miss, I'm sorry, I really am, but"

"Sorry? Don't be sorry. Just tell me what you want from me," she said loudly and angrily, rising from the chair.

"Sit down." He pulled a gun from his pocket.

"Oh, God . . . What are you going to do?"

"You saw too much."

Alison didn't trust her voice but knew she had to say something. "Saw . . . ? I didn't see anything. Really, I didn't." Through her panic she knew she was shrill and unsteady.

"You saw something to make you curious enough to investigate. You were checking things out pretty close when I came up."

"I was just jogging and saw the lanterns — I thought they were eternal flames." The words sounded ludicrous to her now. She looked into the man's unsmiling eyes. "I saw you people filling a grave, that's all. I was just a little surprised that you work at night."

He shook his head sadly. "Of course, you're not curious about . . . that." He nodded in the direction of the furnace door. "I mean if we let you go you'd never wonder about it."

"No. No, I wouldn't."

"I'm really sorry. You're so pretty and young."

Alison knew that he was going to kill her and with that conviction came a calm resolve to act.

The man went to the furnace door, opened it, peered in quickly, and shut it again. Alison didn't look beyond him into the furnace. The gun never wavered from her.

"My fiance knows where I am," Alison said.

"He may know where you said you'd be. But that don't matter. People disappear all the time. You'd be surprised at the number of people who disappear forever. Just take off, go to the store for a quart of milk or something, and never come back. Sorry to say, we've had to help one or two along the way here. Never had any trouble, though. Don't like to do it, but never had any trouble."

He indicated the furnace with his thumb. "You see, no one will ever find a trace of you. Not ever. Of course, your car will be disposed of different."

"I didn't see anything," Alison pleaded.

He took a large, soiled handkerchief from his pocket and honked loudly into it. In that act, the gun wavered from Alison momentarily, and she knew she might not have another opportunity.

SHE SPRANG FROM THE CHAIR, darted through the doorway and clambered up the stairs, expecting to feel the shock of a bullet tearing through her flesh. Dimly, she heard the man yell something indistinguishable.

At full speed, she ran down the center aisle of the chapel praying that the front door wasn't locked. Behind her, she heard the heavy footsteps of her former captor.

Almost whimpering, she tugged at the door. It opened. Slamming it behind her, she leaped over the path into the bushes beside the greenhouse. She had a fleeting glimpse of the pickup idling on the path near the chapel door and heard a voice yell, "Hey, stop!"

Plunging through the trees and bushes, she caught her foot on a branch and fell headlong. Simultaneously, she heard something strike the ground beside her and the roar of a gun. Gasping deeply, she pulled herself to her feet and bolted across the grass. The gun roared again and hot pain seared her left shoulder. Alison spun around, fell to the ground, but immediately bounced up. She saw the flash of the gun from a dark figure running toward her. She turned and opened up to full stride. Two more shots startled the cold night air, but she was moving at windsprint speed.

Full tilt, she burst from the grass onto a road. They'd be in the truck and after her in no time. She paused, testing the air like a hunted fox. She had to get to the fence. The main gate would surely be locked or guarded. The fence was, she knew, her only hope. Alison could picture its high spikes gleaming dully in the moonlight.

She put her hand to her shoulder. It was warm and sticky through the torn sweat jacket. Strangely, there was little pain. She didn't know how badly she was bleeding but knew she had to get out fast.

Fearful of twisting an ankle in the grass, Alison pushed ahead on the road at a fast, steady slip. Soon she was gasping deeply as her legs pounded rhythmically. Sharp pain pierced her right side just below the ribs.

Suddenly, from around the corner behind her, the truck roared as headlights threw her long bobbing shadow on the road ahead. Instantly, she sprang to her left onto the grass, doubled back sharply, and rocketed full speed, weaving through the gravestones.

The truck swung in her direction, trying to pick her up in its headlights. A single, futile shot rang out.

Still at full pace, Alison sped down a sharp dig into a heavily-wooded little gully. She paused beside an enormous oak and listened for the truck. Nothing. She was breathing well and was grateful for the running that had kept her in excellent condition. She laughed inwardly at the irony of the thought.

Her shoulder began to throb and she felt dizzy. Unzipping her jacket, she placed her handkerchief onto the wound. The bleeding seemed steady but not too heavy. Faintly, she could now hear the truck patrolling the road.

SHE GOT UP, AND MOVED MORE SLOWLY AND CAUTIOUSLY, continued toward the fence. She pulled herself up the other side of the gully, looked carefully from side to side, and crossed the next road. Another two roads to cross and she'd be at the fence.

She crossed the first road and stopped beside a pine tree. There was no sign of the truck. The moon had almost completely covered the clouds. She squinted into the dark for the fence which she estimated to be about two-hundred feet away. She didn't know whether or not she could climb it. Even as a young girl she'd never been any good at that sort of thing. And this wasn't just an ordinary high fence. She envisioned the ornate spikes that fringed its top and pictured herself hopelessly hung up. But over the fence was the only way out and she'd just have to do it.

Alison cocked her ear and, hearing nothing, moved toward the

fence. As she approached the road that ran straight one-hundred feet in either direction, she looked quickly both ways and then crossed it and the thirty feet beyond it to the fence.

Trembling and weak, she grasped the cold metal and pulled herself upward, feet pawing the thin spikes. Her hand clutched the top crossbar above which jutted the sharp spikes. As she attempted to raise her left leg to the crossbar, her weakened shoulder sagged and she fell back onto the ground. She stared up at the lethal series of spikes, her shoulder throbbing and weakness pervading her body. Irrationally, she felt resentment toward Doug even as she wished she were with him.

The sound of the approaching truck galvanized her to her feet. She jumped for the top crossbar, pulling slowly and deliberately while her feet pushed and slid against the black rods. She swung her legs up so that she was lying beside the crossbar as she clung to it.

The truck swung onto the grass and up to the fence. Alison pushed upwards with hands and feet, throwing her body over the gleaming spikes, and fell to the ground on the other side. Rebounding instantly, she hit the city street at full pace as a single shot rang in her ears.

"YOUR ADVENTURE CLEARS UP A LOT THAT'S BEEN PUZZLING us for quite some time, Miss Bradley," Lieutenant Peterson said a week later as Alison lay back on a recliner chair in her apartment. The morning sun shone brightly in the window and she felt lazy and relaxed in its warmth.

Doug sat across from her on a large ottoman. He'd been extremely attentive and solicitous of her in the week since the incident. At first, after he'd learned that she was not badly hurt, he'd been angry at what he termed her childish behavior. But rather quickly his attitude changed to care, concern, and something else — a new respect for her, she knew, intermingled with a subduing of his male ego. She'd been sensitive in not pressing the advantage of her exploit too far.

"From your story, your own credibility, and the evidence of your wound," Peterson continued, "we were able to get a court order to do some digging."

"What did you find?" Alison asked, her drowsiness disappearing.

"You name it. Money, merchandise, art objects. Even dope. We don't know how much more we'll find. What more natural place to hide something than by burying it in a cemetery? They've been doing it for years. Buy something, let it lie as long as necessary for the heat to die, dig it up and fence it."

Doug whistled through his teeth. "Were they involved in the thefts?"

"We don't think so. They were the middle men offering the hiding service."

Alison thought back to her ordeal. "Who was th — the, uh, person in the crematorium with me?"

"They had taken him from the grave they were filling. He had been buried a couple of days before. They did the work at night, of course in case the family of the deceased should come by during the day. There'd be no questioning the disturbed ground because the grave site was fresh anyway." Lieutenant Peterson took a long drag from his cigarette and inhaled deeply. "They'd replace the body with whatever they had to hide and eliminate the body by cremating it. That's where you came in, Miss Bradley."

"Damn," said Doug looking at Alison.

"You weren't the first to catch them, apparently. You were lucky, though. You got away. There have been three or four 'mysterious' disappearances over the years that we've been unable to solve but which now make sense. Of course, proving anything without bodies may be difficult. But we've got enough to put away the whole damn crew."

Lieutenant Peterson regarded Alison closely for a moment. "How's the shoulder?" he asked.

"Fine. Just a flesh wound as they say on t.v. I'll be back to work very shortly. As a matter of fact, I've got to attend a meeting by Thursday. There's a little matter my department manager can't quite handle," said Alison a bit too smugly, she knew, as she thought of Phil Santarelli.

"Good. Well, that's it for now, Miss Bradley. Just thought you'd be interested in what we found. Of course, we'll be getting back to you again later."

He shook hands with Doug and Alison as they went to the door. "Well, ma'am, thank you very much. You've been very helpful." He paused a moment. "You know," he said, patting his belly, "I've been meaning to start that jogging business myself. I think maybe you've inspired me."

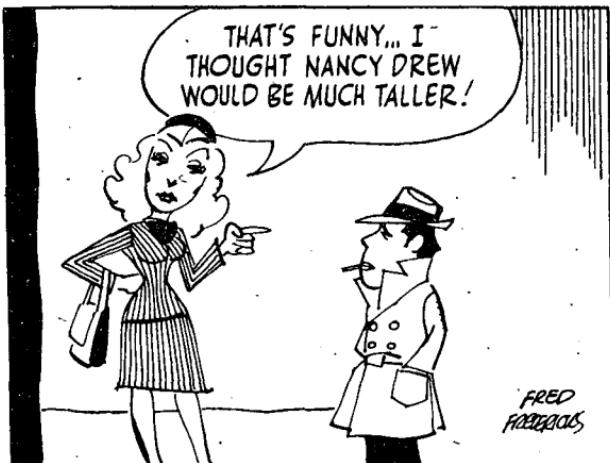
Lieutenant Peterson and Alison laughed. Doug smiled wanly.

"Well, Lieutenant," Alison said smiling, "it's very good for you. You feel great and you see lots of interesting things. But my advice is to try a nice safe public park where all you have to worry about are dogs and a good old-fashioned mugging."

Alison and Doug watched the Lieutenant descend the stairs and turned back to the room. She was restless now to resume running. It had been a week.

Mike Shamus

by FRED FREDERICKS



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Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

One of the happy aspects of reviewing books is the opportunity it gives to bring exceptional authors to the reader's attention. We remember with permanent gratitude the librarian who first told us about John Dickson Carr. Now we'd like to say a word about Colin Watson, the British crime writer whose work is a continuing delight. He is a sharp and penetrating wit with the remarkable gift of expression. In his *Six Nuns and a Shotgun* (Putnam, 1974) he came up with, "She peered into her refilled glass mistrustfully, as if examining a urine sample from a sickly Great Dane." He can also coin words as required, such as, "He had something of the asbestine self-confidence of the Children in the Fiery Furnace."

Now this gifted gentleman, who bears the glorious name of Watson, has produced a new book for the Crime Club, *Plaster Sinners*. It is an absolute delight from beginning to end. At an auction sale the few pitiful effects left by a man who died in an old peoples' home comes up for auction and the bidding soars sky high. Obviously something is, or is thought to be, concealed in the lot, and the chase begins. Inspector Pubright is on the job as is Chief Constable Chubb, whose elevated snobbery is marvelous. As a police procedural it needs to be noted that the forensic lab makes a bad slip-up with no valid excuse! Otherwise here is a splendid entertainment you won't want to miss. And who, but Mr. Watson (alas, not Dr.) would name an old folks' home *Twilight Close*. (Doubleday, \$9.95)

A footnote: Mr. Watson should not be confused with Colin Wilcox the American crime writer, whose work is also highly regarded.



Patricia Moyes, who is an old hand at the game, offers us *Angel Death*, an adventure of Chief Superintendent Tibbett while he is on vacation in the Caribbean. Miss Moyes is a good reliable story teller, and she uses her background well. It should be noted that her description of the symptoms caused by the drug PCP is not correct — she is, in fact, quite far off the mark on this, as we have occasion to know first hand. Also, on page 203, Chief Superintendent Tibbett is quite

abruptly demoted two ranks to Chief Inspector. Barring these lapses, this is a pleasant entertainment, but not more than that this time. (Rinehart, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Possibly inspired by Peter Lovesey, there has been a surge of interest in the earlier history of crime fighting in Great Britain. Now J.G. Jeffreys (Benjamin Healey) offers *Suicide Most Foul*, a very well plotted and engagingly told mystery written in the first person by the head of the Bow Street Runners. This surprisingly competent detective, who is not contaminated by modesty, is called upon to investigate the supposed suicide of a French cavalry captain who somehow is in London high society at a most inappropriate time. Jeremy Sturrock, the Bow Street Runner, tells a vivid, and at times-lusty, tale of his investigation which takes him to the Continent and right into the action at the Battle of Waterloo. The account is vivid and the complications most ingenious. If historical novels engage you, and if historical mysteries have a special appeal, here is one you won't want to miss. (Walker and Co., \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

It is almost a sure thing that a new book by Catherine Aird will be a delight and she does not disappoint in *Passing Strange*. This one is British, of course, and starts out at a flower and horticultural show of the kind the English love to put on. However, someone dims the occasion by strangling a local lady with florist's wire and thus Detective Inspector Sloan is once more called upon to investigate. Those who know Miss Aird's work will expect that the redoubtable Constable Crosby will be on the scene; she does not disappoint. Crosby is unique and his every appearance is a rewarding one. Of course there are complications, but they are unsnarled in due time in a most acceptable manner. You can never go wrong with Miss Aird. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The mass murderer, such as the recently captured Yorkshire Ripper, has undoubtedly inspired Joe R. Lansdale's *Act of Love*. This is a police procedural laid in Houston; when a bizarre killer known as the Houston Hacker cuts loose, black Lieutenant Marvin Hanson takes on

the case. There is some good writing, some sharp suspense, and some engaging plot switches that are the best things in the book. However, the reader needs to be told that this work includes extreme violence, cannibalism, and some necrophilic activity that will twist all but the most case hardened stomach. Possibly in a search for sensationalism, the author has gone beyond the bounds of even realistic crime writing and for that reason a recommendation is difficult to give, despite the fact that the author, in a brief passage, was kind enough to recommend and comment upon our own work. People have done the kinds of things described here: whether they should be presented in this manner it is up to the reader to decide. (Zebra paperback, \$2.75)

☆ ☆ ☆

Every serious reader and collector of mysteries will want to own *What About Murder?* a new guide to books about mystery and detective fiction by Jon L. Breen. Mr. Breen, an academic librarian, enjoys a top reputation in the mystery criticism field of which he has a prodigious knowledge. Now he has compiled a remarkably accurate and highly informative guide to the literature of the mystery story, a piece of work that is worthy of Ellery Queen. If further evidence of the quality of this slim, but very valuable book is required, Dr. Queen has contributed a forward — the imprimeur of the acknowledged master. This is a reference work and has been sturdily manufactured to withstand constant use. A new cornerstone has been added to the literature. (Scarecrow Press, \$10.00)

☆ ☆ ☆

Some paperback notes: Peter Dickinson created considerable interest when he first published his story of an African tribe in modern day London, *Skin Deep*. Mr. Dickinson is not your every day author — he has a rare gift for the unusual and combines with it the ability to write with uncommon skill. Now *Skin Deep* is available from Penguin as *The Glass-Sided Ants' Nest*. At \$2.95 it is a little costly, but worth it. Doc Savage, the man of bronze, is still invincible in two adventures offered in one volume, *The Pharaoh's Ghost*, and *The Time Terror*. The author is Kenneth Robeson (a house name). The pulps live on, as good triumphs and the dastardly get their just desserts. Would that it were always that way! For pure entertainment, in the world of admitted make believe, these stories are a good way to spend a nostalgic evening. (Bantam, \$1.95) ●

Sam loved the girl — but a private detective's gotta do what a private detective's gotta do!

Stumped

by ROBERT LOPRESTI

SPADE KNOCKED ON THE STAGE DOOR OF THE THEATRE just as night began to fall. The door opened and suddenly Brigid was melting into his arms. "Oh, Sam. I'm so glad you're here!"

"Likewise, sweetheart. What's the urgent problem you called about?"

"It's in there." She pointed to the dressing room with a star on the door.

There was hardly room inside for both of them, between the two long objects lying on the floor. One was a ten foot length of tree trunk; the other was a dead body.

Spade gave the corpse a careful look. It had been a well-tanned man in his mid-thirties, wearing a tuxedo. "Who is it, sugar?"

"Felipe Ugarte, the South American musician. Is he dead, Sam?"

"He sure is, angel. Did you kill him?"

She hesitated, then nodded. "I had to. He was blackmailing me. We were friends years ago in Brazil. He knew some things about me that could have gotten me in a lot of trouble."

"Brazil, you say? I remember him now." Spade pointed to the tree. "He's the one who found a tree in the jungle that you can play a tune on."

"That's right, Sam. When struck with mallets it has a range of almost three octaves. It has something to do with sap, Felipe told me."

"And you clubbed him down with mallets aforethought. What do you expect me to do?"

"Give me time to establish an alibi. Ugarte is scheduled to perform in this theatre in an hour. If you put on his tuxedo and dark glasses, you could pass for him. No one in San Francisco knows what his music is supposed to sound like anyway. All you'd have to do is beat on the tree: the sap will do the rest."

"That way they'd think he was killed after the concert, right? And you'd be miles away by then."

She smiled. "Exactly, Sam. And you'd leave before the body is discovered. They'd never tie in either of us. Please do it for me."

Spade looked around the room. "Does Ugarte have another tux?"

"No, he traveled light: just the one trunk. Will you do it for me, Sam?"

"Not a chance, sugar. I'm turning you in."

Brigid pulled a gun from somewhere, but before she could aim it Spade knocked it out of her hand. She collapsed in tears. "But why, Sam? Why won't you help me?"

He shook his head. "You should know me better than that by now, sweetheart. I'd do almost anything for you, but never, never, this." He pointed to the tree trunk. "I won't play the sap for you." ◉

MIKE'S MAIL

DAGWOOD BUMSTEAD?

I have been reading MSMM for several years now and enjoy it very much. Therefore, I am embarrassed that when I finally get around to writing to you it is with a complaint.

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